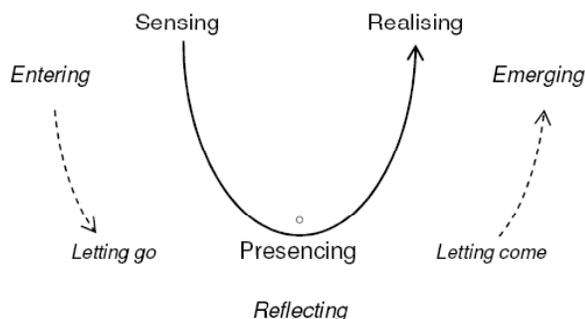


# Learning to Accompany the Child - Part Two

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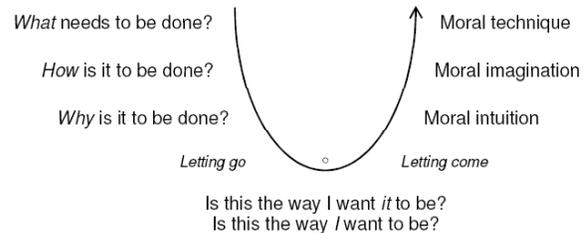
In the first part of this presentation (Allison 2009), I considered what it means to accompany the child, in a social field between shelter and challenge. I also reflected on the process through which we can be fully present; and through which we might grasp those insights we need, and embody them. In now taking these considerations further, we can observe that often today, we have a question, at the edge of which we feel completely in the dark. This is a common experience, yet it is quite discomfiting, and can result in some unfortunate consequences. I've considered some of these previously (see the lecture 'Values and Steiner Education' on my website). We can observe that reactivity to doubt, hatred and fear can fuel some very troubled and troublesome behaviours, characteristic of the unfree person...

There is a path I advocate, first presented systematically in the 1980s by Glasl and Lemson of the Netherlands Pedagogical Institute (NPI) and called by them the U Procedure. It has been a valuable tool in organisation development since that time. Recently it has been elaborated as Theory U by Otto Scharmer; however, I now prefer to call it the U Path. It is an archetypal movement, a genuine praxis-path, which in essence looks like the following:



I have summarised Scharmer's development of Theory U, and articulated my version of the U Path in my lecture 'Presencing through the Life Processes'—there is a transcription on my website, and it is also the final essay in *A Teacher's Book*. Therefore I will take the principle as a given, and here develop the process further in relation to our theme. First, let's recall the concepts we've considered

from the *Philosophy of Freedom* and plot them on this U Path:



Here, on the left hand side, descending deeply into reality, is the path that opens—invisibly at first, as the way ahead can seem pathless—to the future, but before which is an abyss, a void of unknowing. In the face of that nothingness, all past certainties become insubstantial, unreliable. The New, the originating, renewing impulse, emerges only out of darkness; and what is ultimately experienced there as spirit certainty has to be tested by the world before it is valued:

*There, on the threshold, the response, the spirit, is kindled ever new within; here, in an unholy and needy country, this spark is to be proven.*

~ Martin Buber

We must have the courage to enter into the 'valley of the shadow of death'. I know that's a rather dramatic way of putting it! But there *is* in fact a little bit of death involved in this process—darkness before dawn, a *letting go* that must precede a *letting come*. Only then, through those stages we have already delineated from *The Philosophy of Freedom*, does the future emerge.

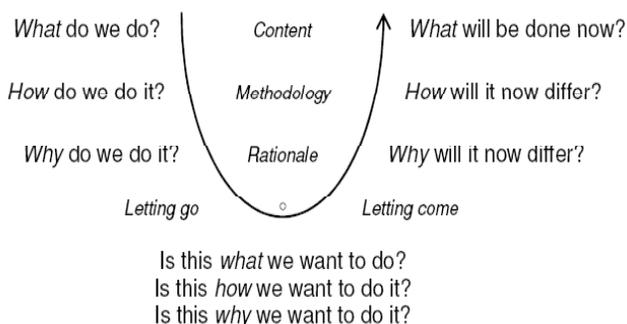
To make this more concrete, let's consider the Waldorf Curriculum—those penetrating *indications* by Rudolf Steiner which, in their purest form, appeared as moral intuitions, in many cases then elaborated by him through moral imagination into actual approaches to subjects and ultimately instituted into practices. A wonderful example of the way Rudolf Steiner himself worked with this pathway is the development of writing and reading in the Waldorf School. Steiner's moral intuition was that reading

would best be delayed until the children were about ten years old, but the authorities demanded outcomes before that age. So Steiner, living into the situation through moral imagination, exploring the possibilities and limitations, began to develop an approach that mirrored a progression in the evolution of human consciousness. Ultimately, his highly skilled moral technique lead to the teaching of the letters, proceeding from story to drawing and movement, to the abstraction of the alphabet and writing, and thence to reading, in the way it is done in the first grades — a way that is intended to cause minimal harm, if only the child is allowed to live the journey...

If we get this right, it's a great example of accompanying the child. And here we have to recognise there is a real challenge: to what degree do we truly accompany the child on this journey of realisation? Or do we now follow a tradition, an established path, cooking up a palatable education from a recipe? We might have to admit that in many cases we have worked these original indications (that is, pointings towards the way) into detailed recipes which are adhered to quite programmatically. Some suggest that this is useful—maybe justifiable—for an inexperienced teacher; but my fear is that these recipes will be the death of Waldorf Education. There can be a rigidification, resulting in unexamined practices, often referred to—you will have heard it, maybe said it—as 'the way we do it here'...

But education is an art and therefore the practitioner must confront the crisis of the blank canvas. My experience is that this is inevitable—circumstances, either inwardly or outwardly generated, require it. We can consider here two situations where genuine threshold research is productive; the first is curriculum review; the second, child study.

In the case of *curriculum review*, I believe we would be well-advised to undertake a continual and thorough reflective practice leading to renewal:



As individuals we can undertake this as a daily practice. For institutions, in our weekly meetings it forms a basis for creative and responsible group-work. The U Path can provide a procedure for our dialogues. As a further instance, in a *child study* we can work it like this:



Each time we need to find our way into the heart of the matter, asking:

- What do we observe? What are the physical phenomena?
- How do the concerns or issues manifest themselves? How is the habit-body active? How do the circumstances play out? In what situations is this apparent?
- Why might this be? What triggers these episodes / phenomena that cause us concern? What soul conditions do we perceive?

These are the first three stages of observational enquiry, through which we diagnose the situation. Then, because we do not really know, because we feel ourselves to be in the dark, because if there was not a lack of insight we wouldn't need to be talking about it at all, we have to *let go*. We feel ourselves to be helpless in this situation. This can be painful to endure. But we can only progress—and this seems to be a contradiction—if we are not attached to outcomes. Here, at the bottom of the U, in the valley of the shadow of death, to which we return repeatedly, the questions confront us at an existential or spiritual level. Michael Ray of Stanford University articulates the core questions thus:

- Who is my Self?
- What is my Work?

The answer to the first question, in terms that Martin Buber might use, is in the order of the 'I-Thou'—to know oneself as a Self, there has to be an Other. This is a fundamental matter of orientation. And the answer to the second

question has to do, not with having a job, but a vocation, a Calling. What is my *magnum opus*? My *real work*? The poet John Keats calls this task 'soul-making'. I've often referred to his wonderful letters, in which he says that we must develop 'Negative Capability—that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact or reason.' This *negative capability*—the ability to stand in nothingness—is the prerequisite state for moral intuition.

Here, in what Keats calls 'the vale of soul-making', we notice that the attention – in those first stages so strongly focussed outside – has become more inwardly directed. When I was teaching my Class One in 1978, I brought a particularly problematic child to the attention of my colleagues. I didn't know what to do, but I was convinced the child needed to change. After discussing this child's problems for a while, seeing them all manifesting 'out there', I caught the eye of one of the other teachers, who asked me quietly, compassionately, bleakly: 'Who do you need to become, John, in order to enable this child's development?'

Answers to such a question do not always just pop up! In fact there is a resistance to even registering the question. Time, and an attendant courage to live with the questions is needed; in his 'Letters to a Young Poet' the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke says marvellously of this challenge:

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to love the *questions themselves* like locked rooms and like books that are written in a foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given to you because you would not be able to live them. The point is, to live everything. *Live* the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live some distant day into the answer.

In the child study, the questions that come at the bottom of this U curve are:

- What does this child need? Who must I be for this child?

Are these questions in reality any different from those asked by Michael Ray? However they come, often these

are humbling questions, which acquire answers only after a profound and often difficult process of *letting go*. A Taoist saying tells us that only when the cup is empty, can it be filled. So, letting go... Letting go, too, of the fear of failure:

In my discovery of the deed that aims at me — in this movement of my freedom the mystery is revealed; but also in failure to fulfill the deed as I intended, the mystery is revealed to me.

~ Martin Buber

Hence, the need for a rigorous *reflective practice* on this path: we act, and, as it may or may not be good, we must examine our action. Then, *letting come*, we are attentive:

Action springs not from thought but from a readiness for responsibility.

~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

We stand in the Valley of the Shadow... At the bottom of the U Path... We learn to *be there*. My mentor Albrecht Hemming always played with the meaning of the word *responsibility*, giving it a spurious though suggestive interpretation in terms of 'response-ability'. An ability to respond... We can reflect on this as we work our way up from the bottom of the curve:

- The emergent moral intuition gives us purpose, motivation, and an aim — this is a response to *Why*.
- As we develop the possibilities in our imagination, a need for developed capacities becomes apparent. We may need new skills, techniques, methods — this is a response to *How*.
- Change can be imposed, inflicted — to enable genuine development, to enable the New to emerge, moral technique is the art of small steps through an action plan and action learning — this is a response to *What*.

As we emerge, that inward transformation is enacted: 'You must be the change you want to see in the world,' said Mahatma Gandhi. These final steps are willed action — responses, not reactions. Their efficacy becomes visible only in the following days. Or maybe years later... This is

the archetypal U Path. It is adaptable to all situations; for instance, I have formulated a U Path question sheet which I give to parents in my workshops, a particular version for them to troubleshoot difficult situations involving their teenaged children... It works, even when it is followed as a prescription, but it is more potent when the process has become internalised. When it is lived. So I say to parents, 'Pin this on your toilet wall, where you can contemplate it daily.' It's quite a good place for letting go!

I have presented this U Path in some detail; you may prefer to live in mindfulness of the essential indicators of the pathway, and especially of these accompanying phrases that come from the Taoist economist Brian Arthur:

- Entering / Sensing: 'observe, observe, observe' — *become one with the world*
- Reflecting / Presencing: 'retreat and reflect' — *allow inner knowing to emerge*
- Emerging / Realising: 'act swiftly, with a natural flow' — *bring forth the new*

In the heat of the moment, it simply means: press the 'pause' button, see what you're looking at, reflect on what might be required, then do it. If you want to consider it in greater depth, you can download that essay, 'Presencing through the Life Processes', from my website. Or else you could visit Otto Scharmer's website to find a detailed exposition of his Theory U.

Now, as I come towards the end of this talk, I find myself thinking of the emergence of the butterfly from its chrysalis. Have you ever watched this process? On a number of occasions I've watched monarch caterpillars, those enormous black-and-yellow creatures bristling with stiff black hairs, amazed by the way they carve at the edges of the swan-plant's leaves in a kind of culminating feeding frenzy. Each time, at a certain point, the engorged body seems to become slightly indistinct — the last time it happened I remember rubbing my eyes in order to focus — but it was as if a slight haze shrouded the creature... Then, quite suddenly the caterpillar had fastened itself from its hindquarters, hung down in the form of a 'J', and ... I think I must have looked away at just this point, distracted, perhaps because I was in the presence of a

mystery — and a few moments later there was a plump chrysalis, jade-green with a series of golden dots around its rim.

That monarch chrysalis did not seem to change for the first week or so. Someone told me that if I had cut it open at the end of this time, I would have found no caterpillar, nor yet a butterfly — just a fluid mush (now *that's* an evocative image in considering the changes taking place in the adolescent! But that's another story...). The green chrysalis gradually darkened, first becoming nut-brown, then blackening, until eventually the butterfly's wings appeared beneath the translucent shell. About two weeks after forming, the husk split, and the monarch butterfly emerged — but not yet resplendent — it was bedraggled, crumpled, struggling to get out. Again, I have been told that if I had tried to help it at this point, to have cut it free, to ease it from the chrysalis, its wings would have been deformed, and I would have deprived it of its full development.

Once free, it sat in sunlight, its wings pulsating gently. The monarch was pumping them up into their full expansive glory... Then it took to the air and light and warmth of late summer.

This butterfly image is often used as a symbol for the process of going through death, to the point where the soul and spirit are released from the husk of the body. And here I can relate it to that little death that has to take place in *letting go*, so the inner knowing can emerge... Sometimes there is form, sometimes there is mush, sometimes there is a difficult transition. How therefore does one accompany the caterpillar-child, the chrysalis-child, the butterfly-child, through its transformations? It begins through learning to accompany the questions through their inward transformations:

He listens to what is emerging from himself, to the course of being in the world; not in order to be supported by it, but in order to bring it to reality as it desires, in its need of him, to be brought — with human spirit and deed, human life and death. I said *he believes*, but that really means *he meets*.

~ Martin Buber

This is why I referred to that gesture we saw in Raphael as *empathic presence*. Empathy is the ability to accompany the inner as well as outer life of another being. David Garb — whom some of you may know — has given a great characterisation of empathy, in contrasting it with sympathy. In sympathy, one loses oneself in the other: 'I see you're in a big black hole — let me get down there with you.' In antipathy, on the other hand, one loses all real relation with the other: 'I see you're in a big black hole — but that's none of my business.' In empathy, however, there is the I-Thou relationship: 'I see you're in a big black hole — what are you going to do about it? How can I support you to do it?'

To be present — on *presence-ground*, as presence-beings in *world-presence*. That is how Rudolf Steiner articulates it in his lessons in the School of Spiritual Science. 'You are not on the Path until you become the Path,' is how the Buddha said it near the end of his life. This mystery — as I put it earlier this evening, of being there, with open-hearted interest, not attached to outcomes — this is what I mean by empathic presence. It takes place in the world-field between shelter and challenge, which also are gestures that belong to the task of the teacher, and which in fact open up the space for all I have presented here...

If it seems I have talked more about the adult than about the child, then you've recognised my intention. For children need us to become adults. Rudolf Steiner suggests that the truly educative element is that a teacher develops, and he articulates this methodically in the so-called 'pedagogical law' — that the higher member in the adult constitution works upon the lower member in the child (eg the adult ego works upon the adolescent astral body, and so on). We live today in an adolescent, reactive society; to become responsible (response-able) is an adult task.

Have I made this task sound complicated? I haven't intended to... I've wanted to share these aspects of theory and practice to illustrate quite clearly what otherwise can seem abstract or mystical — to create a context in which we recognise what Martin Buber means when he says that 'there are moments of silent depth in which you look on the world-order fully present.' Yes, I say to this, knowing that such presencing moments are the source — at least the ambience — of moral intuitions, if only we

would notice them, if only we are sufficiently attentive. Then we might deliberately prepare such moments, have the imagination to see possibilities, and develop the necessary moral technique — thus learning ways in which we can truly accompany the child.

Let's conclude with a little prayer by Melbourne cartoonist Michael Leunig that evokes the tender touching of hands we see between Tobias and Raphael:

Dear God,  
We loosen our grip,  
We open our hand.  
We are accepting.  
In our empty hand  
We feel the shape  
Of simple eternity.  
It nestles there.  
We hold it gently.  
We are accepting.

- Amen

#### References:

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5. Scharmer, C.O. (2007) *Theory U*. Society for Organisational Learning
6. Steiner, R. (1970) *The Philosophy of Freedom*. London : Rudolf Steiner Press

There are transcripts of two other lectures on my website [www.johnallison.com.au](http://www.johnallison.com.au) which provide complementary backgrounds to aspects of this essay:

*Presencing through the Life Processes*  
(Christchurch Sept 2006)

*Values and Steiner Education* (Perth July 2007)