A NINE YEAR CHANGE WORKSHOP

Suggested ideas on the topic by Janet Langley

Recommended grade for this workshop: After spring break of 2nd grade for an older/average age class or early 3rd grade, if you have a young class.

Format: Saturday morning workshop (plan on 2 ½ -3 hours, depending on class size)

*Ask parent/hostess to arrange for muffins, cookies, fruit, beverages, etc. to be available for this session. Also, make arrangements for childcare on campus, if needed for the event to happen- make sure there are enough snacks for the students, as well.)

Who should attend: This subject is important enough that the teacher should find a date that will accommodate at least one parent from each household. Both should be encouraged to attend.

Handouts: I make available to each family a copy of Betty Staley’s description of the nine-year change found on pages 17-20 of chapter 3 in her book Between Form and Freedom. It is a great overview of the subject. I also hand out a “parent version” of the salient points of this workshop, The Nine Year Change, Guidelines for Parents.

Note: Also, Thomas Poplawski wrote an article published in Renewal entitled, Paradise Lost. (This article is from his book, Completing the Circle.) After this workshop, you also might want to initiate a third grade parent study group based on Herman Koepke’s book Encountering the Self or some other appropriate text.

If you have personal antidotes to share along the way to give the parents, please insert them...but, you don’t want to overdo it- not every item needs an example.
Suggested Agenda for 9 year change workshop:

9:30 Introduction (Share a bit about the class- what they have been studying, some amusing or inspiring stories of their activities together, etc.)

9:35 Review the agenda (can have it written on the board)

9:45 Ask each attendee to introduce herself, identify her child and give a brief description of her child- what is the child like at home, has she noticed any changes in behavior in the last 6 months? (This will give you an interesting glimpse into the parent’s view of her child plus those changes in behavior will give you some things to refer back to or to acknowledge during the workshop.)

Note: The time for this will vary depending on the number of people attending- I encourage both spouses to speak since they may differ in their view of their child. Allow 4-5 minutes for each child represented. Don’t shortchange this time! This is actually an activity that I recommend doing at least once a year. It helps the parents to gain a better understanding of the students in their child’s class, as well as lay the foundation for future parent interaction and support. (This agenda supposes 15 attendees)

10:30 What is the 9 year change and why does it happen? Include the following subjects:

- 8-10 years can be seen as a soul crisis- the separation from young childhood (the fall from paradise)

"Rudolf Steiner said; 'In the ninth year the child actually experiences a total transformation of his being, which points to a significant transformation of his soul-life and to a significant transformation of his experience of the bodily-physical’"

- Define the 4 bodies (physical, etheric, astral, ego) include that the hereditary forces stream through the physical, etheric and the “I” through the astral, ego- whenever the forces of heredity and individuality meet it is difficult.
Prior to this change the child’s nature is dominated by the past/inherited forces, during this time the child’s “I” begins to emerge.

Note: I have been told that it is at this time that the corpus callosum, the membrane that separates the right/left lobes of the brain, is mylenated, separating the two. Is it at this point that the left-brain takes on the activity of the right hemisphere of the body and the right brain the left? What does this mean if Anthroposophy tells us that whenever there is a crossing, it is an ego impulse? What does this mean for higher learning? I encourage further exploration here.

10:45 Break (you need to keep this on time if you want to end on time)

11:00 Signs of the nine-year change

*The most intense time for this change normally lasts between 3-9 months.

1) Fear of Death (inner sense of the death of childhood, first thoughts of mortality)
2) Nightmares, fear of darkness ("there’s a robber in the house." Again, the theft of the innocence of childhood)
3) Doubting that she is really your child- often requests stories of when s/he was a baby (baby talk may rear its head) This is a result of a feeling of separation from the heredity stream. (If your child is adopted, questions around “being given up” might surface or become more intense.)
4) Fluctuations between baby, childish behavior and the behavior of a 14 year old adolescent-sometimes within 5 minutes! (Usually these swings last 3-6 months)
5) Alienation- nobody likes me, even my teacher! I have no friends!
6) Seeks out time alone...”thinking”
7) To prove this new awareness that the child is not just an extension of mom or dad, she may purposefully lie to you, just to see if you know she is lying.
8) Cry for no apparent reason- "I don’t know what’s wrong!"
9) May get dizzy at times upon waking (of course, if this persists, see a Dr.) (This is a characteristic of the entry of the astral body.)
10) Separation- realization that “I am me and no one can know my thoughts”.

11) Sadness or disgust at the loss of the magical beauty of childhood: The wonderful stump that was a fairy home is now just a rotting piece of wood. (Similar to going back to revisit a childhood home and realizing how small it was, or ordinary when you remember it as much more.)

12) Adults fall off their pedestals- the child begins to see them warts and all- this can upset the child, scare them, they may pull back, become aloof or critical.

13) 3rd grade teachers can expect student secrets, joint schemes and plots...usually clumsy and unsuccessful!

14) Critical of everything/everyone - except for perhaps their beloved pet, who always loves and understands them.

15) They may try to test your love by doing something overtly defiant...for example, a child raised in a vegetarian home may ask for a bite of a hot dog on a class outing and then look to see how her parent reacts...will they disown her if she is not a vegetarian?

11:25 Positive Aspects of the Nine-Year Change

1) We need to rejoice at this new consciousness, for only out of antipathy can the child really begin to learn- the ability to separate from the subject matter is crucial for analytical thinking and development of critical judgment. This is also the evolution of an active inner life-the beginning of following a thought to see where it leads.

2) The 9 year old becomes a keen observer who is interested in the world and how things work. (She no longer just takes everything for granted.) This is why we begin to introduce new subjects into the curriculum- not just alternating between math and language skill blocks.

3) During this time, lots of energy and enthusiasm is released for learning survival skills- a need to master their environment (How great is the 3rd grade curriculum for this!)

4) Children this age are forced to develop good communication skills so that their needs, thoughts, and ideas are understood.
5) During the 9 year change the child begins to refine/develop discrimination- I want this, I don’t want that. This skill is necessary for making life choices.

6) They also begin to understand that certain liberties require a certain amount of responsibility on their part. This is the time for parents to begin thinking about milestones: when will it be okay for my child to get her ears pierced, go to the movies alone with friends, go to camp, have sleepovers, etc.? It is my recommendation that for every liberty there is at least one corresponding responsibility. (See #3 below) A child that truly experiences this separation will have an easier adolescence. Those who sail right through this time and don’t even seem to struggle, will do so around 14, but it will be much more difficult (for parent and child). This time is a glimpse of your child as a teenager!

11:45 How to Support Your Child During the Nine Year Change

1) Understand their need for privacy; knock on doors, don’t press if the child is not ready to share feelings- sometimes she just needs to be held. If at all possible, allow child her own room or at least special space.

2) Don’t catapult them into teenagers- just because they may act like teenagers at times- does not mean that they are ready to watch PG-13 movies, read books with mature themes (even if they have the ability to do this), wear teenage clothes, hair styles, etc. You won’t like what will be left over for them to rebel against once they reach the 8th-10th grades if you allow this before they truly are teenagers. Most teachers will tell you that the students seem younger in 4th grade than in 3rd- it’s as if they “go back to sleep” in the fourth. This is especially true if their astral forces are not nourished by a permissive environment.

3) Delineate the accountability/responsibility that is associated with new liberties/choices… for each new liberty there should be a corresponding responsibility- For example, before my daughter could have her ears pierced, she had to demonstrate that she could take care of her personal hygiene for a month without my “hounding” her to wash her hair, brush her teeth, etc. The reason for this was the very fact that new piercings require daily activities to ensure that
the site does not get infected. She had to show us that she was capable of this "adult" responsibility. Another example would be if your child wants her own pet—agreements concerning her role in its care should be reached and followed through.

4) Strive to use positive reinforcement as a way of encouraging desirable behavior; guard against using criticism.

5) DO NOT make comments about your daughter’s shape or weight—also be very careful not to discuss your own weight struggles in front of her (or allow older siblings to do this). This can easily set the stage for anorexia or other eating disorders. If your child has a tendency towards being overweight, get her active and be mindful of what food is served/available in your home.

6) Provide guidance through loving, wise authority—children at this age need to know that the adults in their lives are making choices for them out of wisdom/consciousness.

7) Before leveling a punishment take time out to really think it through...is it fair, appropriate—something you can support tomorrow when the emotions have settled? Can you feel good about the consequence? Then make sure you follow through with your decision.

8) Develop a thick skin—"I hate you" can be responded with "That’s okay, I’ll love you enough for the both of us."

9) Call me (class teacher) any time that your child tells you about something that happened in class, or was said that just doesn’t sound right or that you don’t understand. Please bring this concern as a question, not an accusation...seldom is a child aware of or tells the "whole story". * Give the parents a definite time that you will be available...call it the 9 year change hotline! For example from 7-8:30 PM on weeknights or .... Assure them that you want to hear from them, and that if it is not convenient, your answering machine will get their message and you’ll call them back as soon as it is. If you don’t have an answering machine, this is the time to get one...from here on out, it will allow you to control your own rhythm and home needs, yet alert you to concerns.

10) Consider taking your child to a church or other venue that provides moral/spiritual instruction. Prior to the 9 year change, children really don’t need this because they are immersed in the spiritual world (though not consciously). But, after “the fall” out of childhood, they need a way to re-unite with the spiritual world. They will begin
to have questions about good and evil, right and wrong and attending a “church” will show them that others in society share your values. If organized religion is not your family’s cup of tea, how about embarking on Sunday morning nature walks? See if you can find a way to consciously and rhythmically bringing awareness and support to their need to nurture the spirit.

11) Discuss how the curriculum of the third grade (I think more than any other year) addresses perfectly the needs of this stage of development.

12:05 Questions and Answers

12:30 Adjourn

Note: For Christmas presents I gave the students in the third grade a personalized wooden doorknob hanger to place on their bedroom doors as an acknowledgement of their space. (I got them at Michael’s craft store.)

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