

DWS Archery Club

by Michael Baker, Woodwork Teacher and Archery Club Leader

You've shot a few arrows. Your muscles are warming up and you have established your rhythm, your breathing.

You gaze at the target and feel a subtle shift...that small black dot you have been "aiming" at is suddenly all you see. It has a texture, a density, maybe even a smell. What was a moment ago a small black dot painted on a burlap target, now is "touching" you, being "touched" by you. The arrow is already there. The arrow is about to be there. Your muscles do not feel the weight of the bow. The pressure of the string on your fingertips, the force of the bow handle against your arm and shoulder disappear. It becomes your will, the merging of your energy with the stored energy of the drawn bow. Effortless. The cool shaft of the arrow pressed against your cheek is already vibrating in the center of that small black dot. It is your INTENT. It is the bridge that allows time and space to flow in a different partnership. It is the relaxed yet focused INTENT that lets the target reveal its essence to you. It is the cool shaft of the arrow pressed against your cheek.

You are not aware of relaxing your fingers and letting the arrow go. There is simply a moment when the target, the arrow, the bow and you feel connected. Watching the beautiful arc of the arrow's flight, there is a feeling of contentment, of completion.

Your INTENT has brought the arrow to a vibrating pause in the center of the small black dot. There is no joy in this. No feeling of accomplishment. It was simply what was meant to be.

What is written above could be said about a violin, a paintbrush, a eurythmy movement or a basketball. In Waldorf education we talk about educating the will. One of our challenges as teachers is to understand and be able to communicate what this means. The pedagogy of a Waldorf school strives to bring thinking, feeling and willing into balance. An outside observer will notice that a Waldorf school provides a lot of art and movement. It looks like fun for the children. But what about the academics? Solving algebra problems takes a bit of will in our thinking. Daydreaming about palm trees and beaches takes far less. By bringing art and movement into concert with each academic experience, we cultivate the strength and flexibility needed so that our INTENT may serve our thinking. What a powerful thing it is when human beings can both concentrate and imagine.

As teachers, we are constantly working to awaken the kind of thinking in our students that is fueled by clear feelings and formed by an active will. Painting, eurythmy, music and yes, even archery are some of our tools.

So... back to the archery club. Our children have plenty of things in their world to entertain them: Playstation III, Sponge Bob Square Pants, movies and gadgets. We all sometimes need to be amused but it is better if some of our interests can add to us, make

us more than we were, broaden our capabilities. The school used to have a fencing club. Ditto a juggling club. We used to teach ice-skating in a gym block. The unicycle club has been going for almost 23 years. Archery club for 8.

The archery club was born out of my personal OBSESSION* as I quickly rationalized how good this would be for the students, the school and ME! Sixth graders can start and many stick with it for years although some get pulled away to play lesser sports. In an age of compound bows (pulleys, sights, silencers, dampers, counterweights, gizmos, etc.) we shoot traditional long bows and recurves. There are no sights. Your muscles pull the full weight. You learn the basic techniques, fine tune your form and rhythm, and groove in the muscle memory until your body knows how to make the “perfect shoot.” We don’t talk much about the ZEN aspect as described above, but leave it as a free possibility and the instructor’s hope. Sometimes you can see/feel one of the archers get a taste of it. Wow. Shooting in the festival hall is great fun. A couple of times a year we shoot arrows at stuffed animals, which is (awful) fun. My goal is to get them into the outdoors for the sport of roving (stump shooting A.K.A. walking in the wilds with a purpose.) More on this later.

You gaze at the target and feel a subtle shift...you gaze into the eyes of your friend and feel a subtle shift...you gaze up at a flock of honking geese and feel a subtle shift...

P.S. * OBSESSION: I shoot in my apartment hallway. It’s 10 yards from the kitchen to the bathroom doorway!