ABSTRACTS

Steinerschools - a postromantic view on education in contemporary society
Jan Erik Mansikka

Waldorf Education is based on the worldview that Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) developed into a wide ranging anthroposophical movement in the first decades of the 20th century. In this article I attempt to approach Waldorf education from a somewhat different perspective. Steiner’s early thinking opens the way for educational themes that are related both to modern critical education as well as to a romantic conception of life. Many central aims and conceptions in Waldorf Education can be illuminated by seeing them as an outgrowth of the ideas that were central to the Romantic Naturphilosophie. An organic curriculum, phenomenological didactics as well as a high ideal of freedom have all strong romantic undertones but seem, nevertheless, to have certain critical potential for modern education.

Childhood as Cognition: or Taking Philippe Ariès at his Word
Karen Stanbridge

The paper reflects on how Philippe Ariès’s work, Centuries of Childhood (1962 [1960]), and its (in)famous conclusion, “[i]n medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist,” can inform a cognitive approach to childhood. Drawing upon recent research in cognitive sociology, I elucidate a conception of childhood as cognition, childhood as one of the many mental frames or cognitive “schemes” that individuals evoke as they respond to culture. From this perspective, I argue Ariès’s contentious conclusion can be taken to suggest that the “childhood scheme,” the cognitive frame by which modern westerners “think” people within a certain chronological age range, was not available to individuals in medieval society, nor were the cultural cues – personal and structural – that would sustain such a conception of childhood. I reread Ariès’s text in this new light and find he presents evidence that key cultural tools required to enact modern childhood – specifically the notions that age, like time, is linear, limited and quantifiable; that development is tantamount to the “counting down” of chronological age from birth to death; and that childhood is the most significant, developmentally-speaking, stage of the life course – were unavailable to medieval society. I conclude that taking Ariès “at his word” – in other words, accepting that medieval society did not hold the idea of childhood can help advance a conception of childhood as cognition, an approach that holds some interesting possibilities for childhood studies more generally.