

Notable Women

Women in the Waldorf curriculum and beyond...

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Malala Yousafzai: Why Inclusion Matters

October 9, 2012 by [Notable Women](#)



<http://notablewomen.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/10pakistan-articleinline.jpg>

Malala Yousafzai (Source (<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/10/world/asia/teen-school-activist-malala-yousafzai-survives-hit-by-pakistani-taliban.html?hp>))

So just in case you were wondering if gender inclusion in the classroom is still an issue, let's take a moment to keep in our hearts (and if you're the praying type, prayers) the 14 year old girl just shot today by the Taliban because she had the audacity to advocate for girls'

education.

Malala Yousafzai was on a bus filled with fellow schoolgirls when the vehicle was stopped and a man asked for her by name, pulled out a gun, and shot her in the head twice.

Apparently, she's been on the Taliban hit list for some time and the group has made clear that if they she survives this attack, they'll try again.

Malala was targeted because she has become a visible symbol of girls education in an area (the Swat valley in Pakistan) where the Taliban have put women and girls under fire. She has been featured in a [documentary \(http://nyti.ms/SPQxnC\)](http://nyti.ms/SPQxnC) about female education (be warned: the doc has some very disturbing scenes), written a [diary \(http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7834402.stm\)](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7834402.stm) for BBC about her struggle to attend school, and has received a number of prizes for child activists, both in her own country and internationally.

What does this mean for those of us who are lucky enough to live, teach, and attend school in areas where access to education is not restricted by gender? To me, it's pretty simple: there are people (some of them actively organized into multinational armed gangs) who want to erase women. From public spaces, from history books, from life-saving professions like the one Malala wants to pursue. Real women and girls suffer every day from this attempt at active erasure. It's not a metaphor for them.

Our task, therefore, is to strive as hard as we can to keep women visible, in history, in the classroom, and in everyday life. Our classrooms are our own very small, very subdued, but very real battleground. With every child or teen we teach, we have an opportunity to transmit values of equality and peace. And we have the chance to "bring back" some of the women who have been erased from many tellings of the story of humankind. These invisible sisters of history are Malala's predecessors. Some of them were prominent and well-respected in their day and others, like Malala, were forcibly silenced, or even killed, for their acts of self-expression.

So while we may not have much direct impact on events in Swat, Pakistan, we do have a duty to make an intentional effort to address issues of gender in our own classrooms.

Malala Yousafzai would expect no less.

And lest you think this is all very noble, but not central to Waldorf education in particular, I'll leave you with Steiner's prescient words, written in his seminal work *The Philosophy of Freedom* (http://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA004/English/GPP1916/GA004_c15.html) way back in 1894:

So long as men debate whether woman, from her "natural disposition," is fitted for this, that, or the other profession, the so-called Woman's Question will never advance beyond the most elementary stage. What it lies in woman's nature to strive for had better be left to woman herself to decide... **To all who fear an upheaval of our social structure... we need only reply that a social structure in which the status of one-half of humanity is unworthy of a human being stands itself in great need of improvement.**

Amen, brother.

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3 Responses

1. on [October 14, 2012 at 9:00 pm](#) | [Reply](#)  [Susan Ozmore](#)

Excellent. I'm going to reblog this on our News & Notes page. Let me know if that's a problem and I'll remove it. You summarized the situation nicely. It is so easy to take our freedom for granted and we all need to be reminded that there are women and girls still fighting for the right to education. I also am going to check out Steiner's book! I love the quote from him at the end of your post. Thanks again for taking the time and care that you do with these posts.

2. on [October 14, 2012 at 9:02 pm](#) | [Reply](#)  [Susan Ozmore](#)

Reblogged this on [SSS News & Notes](#) and commented:

If you don't know who Malala Yousafzai is you need to read this post. She is a very brave young woman who simply wants an education for herself and other girls.

3. on [October 14, 2012 at 9:04 pm](#) | [Reply](#)  [Notable Women](#)

Great! So glad it was helpful to you. Feel free to reblog things any time. But be forewarned: the Steiner quote is embedded in a book that is mostly his take on epistemology, so it's dense reading for the most part (and not terribly related to women's issues on a whole). But that one quote was just too good to pass up. It captures so perfectly the issue at hand.

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