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Inter-cultural humanism – a common thread of anthroposophy and Waldorf education

Tomáš Zdražil

World wars, totalitarian oppression and a massive propensity for inhuman behaviour are the signature of the 20th century, which has cost millions of human lives. Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, global migration seems to be the greatest humanitarian problem. In 2017 the number of displaced refugees world-wide was 68.5 million. About 25.4 million of these people are fleeing from conflict zones, persecution or infringements of human rights in their homeland. Half of the refugees world-wide are children under 18. 40 million people have been displaced within the borders of their own country.

One of the most pressing pedagogical challenges of today, therefore, arises from the intermingling of different social, linguistic, cultural and religious elements and traditions, and the clashes associated with this. The process of globalisation brings to the surface fears, uncertainties and fundamentalist beliefs that create very strong cultural and religious barriers. Resolving such highly-charged polarisations and conflicts depends upon finding some common ground of inter-cultural humanism, which appears to those concerned as a satisfactory resolution.

The founding of the first Waldorf school in 1919 was an immediate reaction against the inhuman depravity of the First World War. It took place within the context of a campaign for social renewal, which sought to promote the vision of a threefold social organism. This was based upon Rudolf Steiner's memoranda of 1917, which presented a programme for peace and integration.¹ The central question addressed there was that of finding a way to humanise and realise the three fundamental aspects of human social life: the need for freedom, for equality and for solidarity, or liberalism, democ-

1) *Annual report UNHCR 2017*, p. 1. In: http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/gr2017/pdf/01b_Mission.pdf. [query 15.04. 2019]

The Diversity of Waldorf schools in the cultures of the world

Nana Göbel

Nobody knows why the peoples of the earth have different types of sensibility, different festivals, different ways of thinking; why they wear widely different styles and colours of clothes, speak languages so different that we are happy to be able to manage one or two of their sounds; why, in short, human beings the world over are so different and yet all human beings. According to the story in the Old Testament this diverse human condition takes its origin from human arrogance (*Gen. 11,7*). Confusion is the consequence of arrogance. And not until this has been overcome, as foretold in the story of Pentecost, will a language and culture of direct mutual understanding be possible. In the meantime we give the large chasms between us names such as language, manners, customs, or even culture. And as long as the vision of Pentecost has not been fulfilled, we have no other recourse than to study other cultures and traditions in all their diversity of expression. Slowly, through studying their art forms, through the gestures of their languages, through their great myths and epics, we get closer to an inner feeling for the soul-movements of other cultures, even though we are still far from understanding them. It is an important task to practise this inner feeling and identifying the inherent qualities of cultures, both with respect to one's own familiar culture as well as the other unknown, exciting, foreign ones. One's own culture indeed contains many hidden treasures as well, that must first be uncovered.

In view of all this, establishing an inner relationship between the principles of Waldorf education (as exemplified in *The Foundations of Human Experience*) and a particular, still-to-be-fully-explored cultural context –be it one's own or some other– is a gigantic task. For nothing less is demanded of a Waldorf teacher than that he or she grasps these principles in a way that enables him or her to find and use the elements of his or her own culture that meet the pedagogical requirements of a particular situation.

Michal Ben Shalom

The House of the Book – The House of the Child

Michal Ben Shalom

On the first day, when the Rabbi showed me the »Alphabet« board full of letters, there immediately jumped up before my eyes an army of lines and more lines of soldiers, just like those who pass by our house, with a drummer at the head of the column: Tam-Tarrar!!!

After all, these letters looked like marching men who are armed from head to toe.

These »Aleph« (א) soldiers march somewhat bent under the weight of their rolled-up rucksacks.¹

[...] my eyes begin to scan the sides of the letter board.

»Who are you looking for?« the Rabbi asks.

»The drummer...« I say, my eyes still restlessly surveying the board.

[...]

For the rest of the day, I think about this army, and on the next day, when the Rabbi once again shows me »Aleph« (א), he says:

»Do you see a pole and a pair of buckets?«

»Well, yes, I swear, a pole and a pair of buckets...«

»Then this is Aleph«, says the Rabbi.

»This is Aleph«, I repeat.

»What is it then?« he asks again.

»A pole and a pair of buckets«, I reply, taking great pleasure in the fact that the Holy One, blessed be He, has summoned these fine vessels for me.

»No! say Aleph!« repeats the Rabbi. »Remember: Aleph! Aleph!«

I walk away from him, the letter A (Aleph) flies away from my heart, and in its place comes an image of Marusia, drawing water from the well.

[...]

I see her as she is, with her bare feet and her thick tresses, carrying on her shoulders a pole with a pair of buckets hanging on both its sides! And... there is the well, with the water trough on the side, and the geese splashing in the nearby puddle...

1) »Aleph« is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

into thinking and the original enthusiasm formulated in words. This inward path is the first step – combining will with thinking via feeling. The second step is then to put the thought structure into practice.

The path then goes outward from within. This means that the thought, via feeling, combines with will in the form of action. If the people of Senegal learn of Waldorf education in this way, it will take a completely different form from that which it has in Germany. But it will be in tune with the local people and thus with the process of creating the future of Senegal.

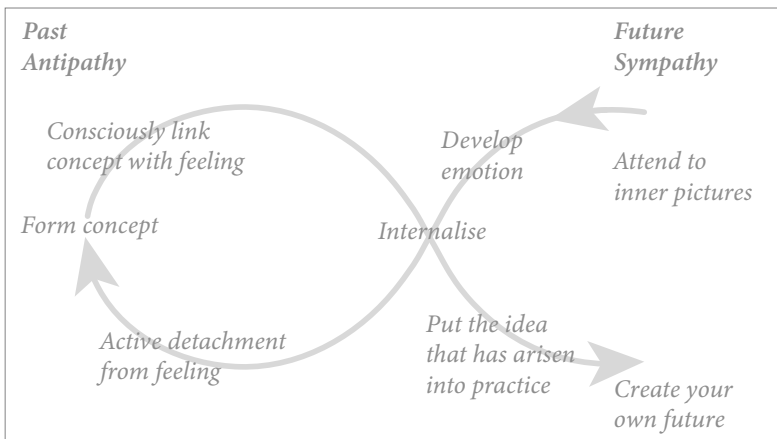


Figure: Own illustration

What I am saying is that the people of Senegal may thus develop Waldorf education on the basis of their own bodily nature – according to how they feel, how their bodies have been formed out of the pre-natal world. This will entail creating a rhythm, for rhythm implies setting a framework, of sympathy and antipathy. The interplay of sympathy and antipathy is reflected in the life of feeling. This is why rhythm is so important in the educating of children, for children must explore this rhythmic space, inhabit it and feel secure in it. It is in this meeting-place of the feelings that the poles of sympathy and antipathy are united. This is how I envisage Senegal working towards its own future with the help of Waldorf education.

Michaël Merle

Ubuntu and a New Appreciation for the relevance of *The Study of Man. The Perspective of South Africa*

Michaël Merle

»We dare not simply be educators; we must be people of culture in the highest sense of the word. We must have a living interest in everything happening today, otherwise we will be bad teachers for this school. We dare not have enthusiasm only for our special tasks. We can only be good teachers when we have a living interest in everything happening in the world. Through that interest in the world we must obtain the enthusiasm that we need for the school and for our tasks. Flexibility of spirit and devotion to our tasks are necessary.«

Rudolf Steiner, Opening Address, Given on the Eve of the Teacher's Seminar; Stuttgart, August 20, 1919, The Foundations of Human Experience – Formerly: Study of Man – GA293, Translated by Robert F. Lathe and Nancy Parsons Whittaker, Anthroposophic Press, 1996.

With these words as part of the concluding remarks of his opening address to the teachers gathered in preparation for their tasks in this new venture of the Waldorf School, Rudolf Steiner placed the endeavour and the focus of this education on an understanding of culture. Following on from Emil Molt's introductory note of thanks the next day, Steiner placed what was to become known as Waldorf education in the context of the fifth post-Atlantean epoch. He explained that the task of each epoch (human developmental era) only becomes apparent some time after the onset of the epoch. The educational task of the era which began in the fifteenth century is only now emerging (in the beginning of the twentieth century). With these remarks certain things become clear. Firstly, this educational task is particular to the aims and goals of the fifth post-Atlantean period. Secondly, it is only just emerging in 1919, and hence may be seen as taking a step in maturity in 2019 but by no means »old« or »past its sell-by-date« (beyond its relevance) today.

Freed from the fetters of tradition

If we look at the continuing development of that young nation, we find countless souls streaming to America in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries.¹⁵ Writer Dorothy Thompson gives us this description of what a typical American might look like:

»An American is a fellow whose grandfather was a German ›forty-eighter‹, who settled in Wisconsin and married a Swede, whose mother's father married an Englishwoman, whose son met a girl at college, whose mother was an Australian and whose father was a Hungarian Jew, and their son in the 20th century right now is six feet tall, goes to a state college, plays football, can't speak a word of any known language except American and is doubtful whether he ever had a grandfather.«¹⁶

Such a heterogeneous mix led to an openness toward many different ways of life. There was no »one right way« to do many things in such a cultural mosaic.

We find a tremendous force of will at work in this new land: the will to religious freedom, to economic independence, to exploration of the unknown – all of this freed from the fetters of tradition. Informing these years that »birthed a new nation« was the kind of optimistic attitude that is normally found only in young people. »Anything is possible if you put your heart into it« is an expression many Americans grow up with.¹⁷ Pragmatic experimentation and improvisation were frequently the way to success in the

15) The »New World« had a population of 3 million in 1782, grew to 6 million by 1804, reached 12 million by 1828, and 50 million by 1880. Mid-20th century the U.S. population was 150 million. In: http://npg.org/facts/us_historical_pops.htm [query: 22.03.2019]

16) Cited in F.W. Zeylmans van Emmichoven, *America and Americanism*, Spring Valley 1986, p. 8.

17) Unmentioned in this description is the ancient spirituality and interwovenness with nature that lived in the Native Americans who had populated the continent for centuries before the colonies formed. Also unmentioned is the enslavement of countless African Americans until mid-19th century and their continued struggle for equality.

The descriptions of class 12 projects, which are presented every year at Waldorf schools, are equally impressive: »Creating a society in which each individual can carry out a small-scale project«; »Envisaging a form of international cooperation which goes beyond the established framework, creating a social context in which material wellbeing does not lead to spiritual restrictions«; »How can we live together on earth with other living organisms in such a way that endangered species are recognised and valued for their own intrinsic worth?« One senses that in the words of these students lie the seeds of a new »I«, which goes a step beyond that hitherto known in Japan. This is evident from the fact that it is not only directed outwards, but also sees itself as a flexible vessel for the Other, and at the same time quite naturally recognises itself as an entirely unique, solitary being.

The sun, the moon and the earth are orbs, spherical beings. The human body also arises out of a spherical form. Similarly, the human »I« is circular, a sphere. Eurythmy teaching, as introduced and practised in Japan, grants us a way of appreciating this »tiny« piece of knowledge.

The double meaning of the Japanese word »wa« (= »I« and »circle«)

In Lecture 10 of *The Foundations of Human Experience* Rudolf Steiner, in describing the threefold structure of the human organism, illustrates this in the form of a simple, rather curious drawing. What is characteristic here is that the human form is conceived in spherical terms (a triple sphere).

The human being is structured into the three main areas of the »head«, »the chest« and »the limbs«, and each one has a form of its own. It is readily observable that the head has a round shape, but the chest displays a sickle shape, in other words, a moon-like form, one part of which is »missing«. This means that while the »head« is visible as a whole, the »chest« is only partially so. »The chest reveals its physicality only on one side, that is, toward the rear; toward the front it blends into the soul state.«²

The fact that the chest is constituted in this way provides the reason why the ribs nearest the head are closed, complete forms, while towards the bottom

2) Rudolf Steiner: *The Foundations of Human Experience* (GA 293), New York 1996, p. 160.

the child to begin preparing for this life in a subtle and profound way. Its ability to imitate is therefore an unconscious but high form of confidence. In words of Federico García Lorca (*Las nanas infantiles*, 1928): »Far from us, the child has full creative faith, and does not have the seed of destructive reason. It is innocent, and therefore, wise.«²

The child is attentive. It is not an intellectual attention. It is will that is present, it is tirelessly present will. How many times does a child need to fall down to be able to start walking? How many hours of listening does a child need to start talking? How do you learn to understand what others say? How much attention does a child need to put in each of its learnings? Attention, another quality of imitation that allows it to be totally present in his will, and to be incorporated into itself and into life. A new quality of imitation, the will that manifests itself in that intense presence.

The child is good. The imitation, as a gentle precursor of the interest in the other, of conscious compassion, allows the child to travel from spirit to spirit, from its innermost being to our most intimate being, from the best in it to the best in us, as a soft precursor exercise of morality. In that intimacy of being with being it can feel in us all our spiritual strengths, our joy, our commitment, our gratitude, our capacity to forgive, our resistance, our perseverance ...

Imitation allows us to start learning and selecting the »tools« we will need in our adult life as soon as we are born. In the age of imitation we can receive these necessary gifts, so that, when adolescence starts showing up, we can walk more and more consciously on a path towards our destiny. The abilities of the young child, as experiences full of his will, wake up like a great dream in adolescence.

But what happens in between this deep »sleep« of the little child and the emerging self of the young person?

The careful, continuous observation of the growing child, internally kindled by the class teacher, is a source of joy for the work in the classroom, an inspiration for the pedagogical deeds and a gift that nurtures vocation. The experience of chronological and cosmic time of the year through sea-

2) Federico García Lorca: *Las nanas infantiles*, 1928. In: <http://www.biblioteca.org.ar/libros/157654.pdf> [query: 13.5.2019]

Caring for nature

A pedagogy of imagination, love and ethical thinking

Arve Mathisen and Marianne Tellmann

A deeper aim within Waldorf education is to foster and encourage feelings of love to awaken towards nature and fellow human beings.¹ With regard to today's ecological crisis, questions arise on how education can take an ethical stance towards approaching all beings in nature with the respect and care necessary for creating a mutually sustainable future. How can teachers sow seeds of love and responsibility towards nature in their pupils? The formation of identities and new relationships during adolescence highlights these years as especially important concerning issues of sustainability. In Norwegian Waldorf schools, there is a long tradition of spending extended time outdoors; of being active in multiple natural environments and of letting pupils experience landscapes and natural forces through the joys and challenges they face when being out in the open.

In relation to selected ideas from Rudolf Steiner's 1919 lectures, *The foundations of human experience*,² we investigate the possibilities of deepening adolescent pupils' experiences of connectedness and love towards beings and phenomena in nature. We will take Steiner's thoughts on imagination and moral development in the pedagogy of early adolescence as a starting point. Based on these initial ideas, the chapter will provide stories of educational outdoor activities with glimpses of images, feelings and love that intend to connect children and teenagers with the natural world. Since the educational principles pertaining to adolescents build on foundations laid during earlier years at school, we will include nature activities and relation-building examples from primary school, as well. The mentioned core ideas from Waldorf education will be related to contemporary works

1) Cfr. Rudolf Steiner: *The child's changing consciousness as the basis of pedagogical practice* (GA 306), Hudson 1996a.

2) Rudolf Steiner: *The foundations of human experience* (GA 293), Hudson 1996b.