

New directives taking action in the secondary education system

Waldorf School – where to?

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Abstract

Waldorf School represents an alternative to the traditional teaching methods, regarding primarily state education. Its pedagogy relies on the pedagogical indications of Rudolf Steiner. Waldorf school is a European school; every individual that is concerned about the globally ongoing evolution of the pedagogical concepts, knows and acknowledges its success in all developed European countries.

Key-words: *Waldorf School, traditional education, Rudolf Steiner.*

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1. Introduction

Waldorf education is a teaching form based upon anthroposophical teaching and educational methods. The first Waldorf school dates since 1919, was established in Stuttgart, Germany and directed by a team of teachers who had been trained under Rudolf Steiner's guidance. It was financed by Emil Molt, Steiner's advocate and the owner of the Waldorf Tobacco Factory in Stuttgart, to serve the purpose of educating the employees' children. Since then, the number of the Waldorf schools (sometimes also called Steiner schools) has progressively increased, so much that up to this day, it represents one of the most spread types of independent pedagogy in both Europe and North America.

The Waldorf methodology is structured on a series of notions regarding human development in which the individual is viewed as a tridimensional being that reunites three main characteristics such as body, soul and spirit. The latter are meant to offer the teacher a better understanding of the inner being of the child. Nevertheless, these solely remain work methods and do not become an actual teaching content. For example, it is assumed that every child undergoes a personal development devised in periods of seven years depending on which are established a number of aspects regarding the conduct of the education.

2. The pedagogical concept of Waldorf schools

The educational concept of the Waldorf schools sustains that only through a proper teaching that relies on the inner necessities of each age, can lead to a sense of freedom in human development which is why it is called "education for freedom". This designation should not be however misinterpreted because it does not refer

to an education that empowers the child with absolute freedom, but to an education that provides a foundation in acquiring an independent thinking that comes when reaching maturity.

In 1919, Dr. Rudolf Steiner, the father of anthroposophy together with Emil Molt, took the decision to fund a school that would represent a sort of embryo for the birth of a free spiritual life. From the very beginning, the developers had set their goal in projecting a school – Waldorf School – whose foundation consists of fresh pedagogical perspectives, that takes in consideration the art of education, not only of the human as a social concept, but also of the human as a spiritual and soul-having being.

This education is anthropologically oriented, taking into account the needs and capabilities of each individual. The content of the disciplines does not intend the formal acquirement of information, but the stimulation of the child's interest for knowledge. The development of the child's power of will, thinking and feeling, are essential objectives of this educational alternative. The main approaches used for the growth of thinking, will and feeling of the child is materialized through: artistic exercise (educates the will), the spoken word (acts upon the child's affection, allowing him the possibility to focus on the taught subjects), practical exercises (leads to learning by doing, through concrete activities and practice).

Waldorf pedagogy harmoniously induces, in the act of teaching, the caring for the three components of the human being: thinking, feeling and will. It unites analytical and artificial thinking, the objective intellect of consistent work, in a high and meaningful sense, through artistic and moral feeling.

In Romania by the year of 1991, the Ministry of Education and Research recognizes the Waldorf pedagogy is especially based on child and human knowledge. In this type of teaching method, the accent is centered upon the authority of the teacher in front of the pupils.

3. The principles of Waldorf pedagogy

Waldorf education relies on the teaching techniques that are ruled by the laws of childhood that govern during this stage of life:

- The child is an entity of feelings, will and thinking. The man is related to the world in many ways, through physical activity, soul and spirituality. Rudolf Steiner highlighted this triple relationship and put it in correlation with the organization of the human body, while simultaneously presenting the connections between these three features.

The head, heart and hands have equal significance for child development. Therefore, the development of cognitive, moral and practical-crafting skills is correspondingly stimulated in Waldorf pedagogy.

- The child is perceived as "a sense organ" for all impressions. Any positive impression works as a liberating act for the child, while all negative impressions leave traces for life, like scars, both in the harmonious development of the organs and in the child's soul. Rudolf Steiner states that through the senses, the child touches life, smells it, tastes it, sees it and embraces it with all of his being. It can be said that he "breathes" the world alongside with everything that it has to offer, and the impression, the sensations go up in the organs, being forged into feelings and thinking afterwards.
- The child learns through the force of imitation. The force of imitation manifests itself through games – age-specific activity in which the child transforms the world through fantasy in an individual way.

That is why the game must be played freely. An educator must stand in front of the child as a model worthy of imitation.

Our gestures, attire, offered images, speech, facts, but also the quality of our thoughts will be imitated. The animated things, joy, order and the meaningful actions will shape the child's brain.

- The forces that lead to growth and the forces that act in the understanding of things are the same. When we early burden the child's memory with notions, when we overwhelm the intelligence, we prematurely exhaust the forces of growth and regeneration and limit his fantasy levels that support the entire subsequent development of the child.
- The individual learns to be human only from other humans how to be human. The most important things for a child's development are the human interaction and direct perspective through which the child will be able to develop his human traits such as: individuality, communication, freedom of will, the ability of judging for him. This happens only if, at the right moment, he can openly and directly report himself to the personality that takes over the care of his education. Replacing human contact with TV, audio-video cassettes, computer, will condemn the child at this age to passivity.
- Progress requires time. In education, a step is built on another. We need to act not according to general principles, but according to the child's development and to what is specific at his age. Up to seven years we must bring something to the child through the power of "doing" and not by rationally teaching him how to obtain that something. He should never be treated as if he were a little adult. The child's intelligence at this age is a practical one and so it relies in the hands, not in the head. The child knows the world through game. Rudolf Steiner said that "The game must be turned into learning and not vice versa, because the game has a seriousness that has to be kept holy in the process of learning".
- Childhood must be defended from precocity, from the overwhelming of the feelings, from everything that harms the child's fantasy, of what develops fear, aggression and insecurity. Without a full and serene childhood, the entire previous life shrinks. Childhood is the source of a healthy body, strength of soul, of a more individualistic and socially-opened thinking.

Using rhythm in education allows the whole being of the educated person to be addressed and not only its intellectual component.

The pace of the day involves studying subjects with cognitive character in the first part of it and the artistic and practical ones in the second part. This makes the deepening of the theoretical subjects possible by applying them in practice and by reanimating them in an artistic way.

Waldorf School's educational process takes place in the absence of grades. The studying hours are much freer; students are being more open and participate naturally to the courses, without living in the constant fear of receiving bad grades. This way, most students ask for assistance when they that did not understand something and are more inclined to courageously go to the blackboard to solve problems without the fear of being judged by their answers.

On the other hand, the eminent students are always willing to help their colleagues in need. In general, students learn driven by the desire for knowledge but also by conscience. Students regularly receive homework and control papers. However, their purpose is not to get a higher grade, but to do the best possible paper. Reading and writing are taught during the first classes in Waldorf Schools, focusing on the drawing of the letters and on the organization of the aesthetics of the writing.

4. Conclusions

Unlike the traditional system applied in Romania, Waldorf proposes an educational awareness of the educational factor; however the following aspects should not be forgotten:

- The Romanian society is still in full transition, and maybe because of this issue it is still reluctant to what is new;
- Documentation and information sources that fit this type of education are still scarce;
- The greatest obstacle is the lack of money, so that is why it is preferred the traditional system where education is free.

In Romania, Waldorf education is a state education organized by the Ministry of Education Research and Youth, under the General Cooperation Agreement concluded in 1996. From the network of units it can be drawn the spread of this educational alternative in Romania. The results of the national exams of capacity and baccalaureate confirm the performance of this alternative education which confers an equal position in the national education system.

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