

Week Two: The Hague Circle Colloquium

Colloquium on "bodily experience and intellectual development," 19th to 21st April 2022 at the Goetheanum in Dornach, organized by the Pedagogical Section and the Hague Circle - International Council for Steiner Waldorf Education.

After the IASWECE council meeting, which ended on Easter Saturday, most Council members returned to their countries. As the Hague Circle had extended an invitation to IASWECE's council members, it seemed appropriate to stay the extra week after having travelled from so far away. Australia, New Zealand, Switzerland, South Africa and the USA (Susan Howard) were the participants.

The background to the initial meeting is outlined in summary below with thanks to the shared notes of the IASWECE council member for Estonia, Heli Müristaja, who was able to attend. (18th – 21st November 2021)

After this meeting, the Hague Circle and the Pedagogical Section scheduled a further meeting and this time with the wish to have more early childhood representation.

The purpose for this meeting was to allow an opportunity to progress these points in a similar format.

The outcome was so that more thoughts and discussions could be gathered as seeds for the World Teachers Conference 2023 in Dornach.

Each day began with a lecture given by different specialists in their fields of academia, anthroposophy and physiology. Mostly the lectures were presented in German.

A presentation was given by the Freunde (Nana Gobel) and a few others who had recently returned from the Ukraine. Nana is appealing to everyone to fundraise so that they can continue to pay the Ukraine teachers who are working in Europe, so that the displaced children can at least experience some normalcy in their day to day lives.

We are yet to receive translations of some of the lectures.

Overall, it was very worthwhile to participate in this meeting. There is still a long way to go towards the threefold pedagogy foundation of 0-7; 7-14 and 14-21. What is evident though, is the deep striving, to somehow find this middle ground, research and enthusiasm to ensure that Waldorf education remains contemporary and is meeting these extreme needs of our time.

With warm wishes,
Heather

BACKGROUND

1. Hague Circle 50th Anniversary meeting at Goetheanum on 18.-21st of November 2021

SUMMARY:

The main topics discussed:

- The challenges of waldorf-schools and also kindergartens
- The expectation to the future- schools
- Study done by teacher faculties
- Preparation of classes
- Cooperation with the parents

2. Advent 2021- HAGUE CIRCLE MEETING

Tasks and goals for a sustainable Waldorf movement

In preparation for the centenary celebrations 2019, many schools and kindergartens all over the world took part in a conversation reflecting on the anthropological-anthroposophical foundations of Waldorf education, mindful of the context of contemporary research. The feedback from countries on all continents showed how fruitful this work was - and how necessary that it took place.

With this feedback, the Hague Circle proposed three suggestions to help focus this task of reflection and renewal on a global level. The pandemic has revealed many of our strengths, but also many weaknesses. We have to address these issues, because Waldorf education can only continue to be sustainable through our actions.

The recommendations presented here are the result of intensive consultations amongst the members of the Hague Circle, at a meeting held in November 2021 for the first time after a long break. To begin with, here are some perspectives.

1. The pandemic has made weaknesses of Waldorf institutions more visible in the following areas:

- The leadership and management, and the quality and vitality of cooperation between colleagues in some schools
- the deepening of the principles and practices of Waldorf education
- a learning culture in which the independent learning and personal experiences of the pupils and students and their active research of the material is not cramped by an over- emphasis on frontal instruction ("Waldorf cinema", or "chalk and talk")
- the importance of subject knowledge and expertise as a prerequisite for creative and flexible teaching
- curriculum research and renewal
- the culture of professional development and teacher development

- Cooperation with parents
- Communication in the public sphere

2. Some challenges of our time:

- How can children's abilities to relate to other people and to the world be strengthened?
- How can children learn that they are emergent, growing human beings (not machines) – and what does this mean in practice?
- The growing polarization of society, which is also reflected in many Waldorf faculties and parent bodies ("walking opinions")
- A deep understanding of the heart and its working, as a means to counter an increasingly mechanistic view of human beings and the knock-on effects of this view for kindergarten and school organization and operations
- Fear
- Media literacy
- The roles of anthroposophy and the School of Spiritual Science and the appetite and interest with which our institutions interact with people and institutions beyond the anthroposophical scene.

Proposal to the Waldorf Faculties and Colleges for their work from January 2022:

The weaknesses listed above are undoubtedly counterbalanced by many strengths, which each day lead to beautiful and significant, sometimes life-changing interactions between the children, young people and adults. However, this is not a dance around an imaginary centre: If left unaddressed, weaknesses that have become systemic threaten to weaken the strengths as well. Let's turn this around! The aim of this call is to work on these matters with goodwill for the future!

The suggestions for topics to be worked on:

1. internal mental hygiene and school management, the importance of the pedagogical meeting as a place of study, further education, joint learning and exchange of experiences and new ideas – in short: being the heart of the school.
2. putting cooperation with parents on a new footing
3. prepare better materials and methods for responding to digital media (indirect and direct media education, see footnote and help children and young people to be able to take hold of their own bodies. Pay more attention to the fact that learning arises directly from life and lived experiences.

3. Questions and possible goals General:

- **The promotion of the pupils' independent learning belongs in every lesson and every subject from the first day of school:** knowledge of the

significance of one's own actions, the experience that one's feelings can be extended to become organs for perceiving others and the whole world, and the confidence in one's ability to think and develop knowledge and understanding are decisive factors in the self-determination of every human being.

- **The Waldorf School focuses on educational methods and approaches to teaching and learning**, it is not a place of ideological indoctrination.
- **The methodology and the anthropological-anthroposophical foundations (study of human being)** should therefore be worked in response to concrete questions and incorporate contemporary research findings as well as methodological ideas and methods of other educational impulses. The shared study of Steiner lectures serves as a potent introduction or conclusion to the teachers' meeting. Discussions covering a range of educational methods and topics benefit from a broad range of approaches – conversations between small groups of colleagues, experimental and artistic approaches, questions – conducted in open spaces that grant the space for personal experiences to be shared.
- **Recommendation 1:** Study of the heart anatomically, physiologically and taking indications from spiritual science into account.
- **Recommendation 2:** Anthroposophical Leading Thoughts, numbers 183, 184, and 185.
- **New subjects, ideas and themes** for cross-curricular or cross-age teaching. New initiatives need open spaces for consultation and experimentation without regard to traditions or other taboos.
- **Encourage young teachers** instead of hectoring them with old habits!
- **Each school should articulate its identity**, taking into account the unifying impulse of Waldorf education as well as the individual character of each school (unity in diversity).
- **School leadership and management:** Qualitative distinctions between leadership, collegial decisions, delegations, the remit of life-span of mandates and reporting requirements must be made and then implemented in each school.
- **The theme of leadership** – 'leadership by all', 'integrated leadership' and 'woven leadership' must already be introduced and become part of courses and programmes in initial teacher education.

School practice:

- Each school should maintain regular **contact** with at least two schools in their locality or region, and seek to make contact with at least one school abroad. This includes, where possible, regular conference visits, joint subject and working groups, school events and so forth.
- **Upper school:** exploring a move away from the traditional school programme and 'offer', including the compartmentalisation of subject specialisms, towards permeable subject areas, issues and topics that cut across traditional subject boundaries and the creation of spaces for personal initiatives.
- **Lower school:** more care for the practice of primary virtues

- **Mentoring** and peer-coaching must become a natural part of a school's quality development programme and, where this is not possible, high-quality **supervision** must be present.
- **A mandatory introduction period and in-service training** for colleagues must become natural aspects of **quality development** in a school.
- **In interactions and relations with parents** schools must seek to place these relationships on a new footing:
 - How are parents involved in school governance and administration?
 - What expertise do they bring with them?
 - Who can parents turn to if they have questions or complaints?
 - What are the school's processes and time-lines for responding to questions and concerns?
- **School leadership** must be clear, with individual responsibilities agreed, respected and transparent. The teachers' meeting must be understood and respected as the heart of the school and must dedicate itself to the educational mission with an attitude of action research based on living questions that arise from close observations of the school and its context.
- Every school needs a **prevention concept** against sexual assault or other forms of violence.²
- **Pupils and students** should be involved in the organisation of the school in a responsible way, according to their age. In the upper school this also concerns the organisation of the curriculum and timetable.
- **Outreach:** Every school should seek to offer educational opportunities to children in the wider community; for example, by cooperating with neighboring schools, and working in collaborations with other colleagues, to offer a range of artistic and other activities.

Teaching:

- **The three-stage learning process** has to be revisited and the pupils addressed as acting, feeling and thinking subjects throughout.
- **Cultural techniques** (spelling, later business letters, emails, netiquette, etc.) must be practiced in time.
- **Language** is one of the most important instruments for the development of extended and differentiated thinking skills. Because of the decline of language culture, the health and vitality of language practice now belongs in every school and teacher's meeting and, in this way, through the classes.
- **The aesthetic relationship to the world** must be nurtured through all ages in order to cultivate a rich life of feeling as an essential basis for independent judgement.
- The children need **movement!**

- **Experiences of nature** need to be reinforced, which includes a storytelling culture that makes children curious about their own experiences.
- Cultivating **inner images and exercising the imagination** as a necessary counter- vailing force to media `overkill`.

All these suggestions can be added to, modified and refined. What is crucial is that these issues are questioned, addressed and tackled. For this we wish you courage, strength and joy in the work and the children!

The colloquium ended at midday on 21st April 2022.