

## The Attitude and Task of the Teacher

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Throughout his foundational lectures, Rudolf Steiner presented a number of ideas to the first group of teachers of the Waldorf School in Stuttgart. More explicit ideas were about developing a deeper, anthroposophical understanding of the human being and human development, working with sympathy and antipathy, developing the will and awakening intellect, as well as working with the temperaments and giving indications for how and when to bring aspects of the curriculum. However, towards the end of Lecture 14 of *The Foundations of Human Experience*, Steiner begins to "shed some light on how the teachers themselves must be" (*The Foundations of Human Experience*, Lecture 14) and he ends this lecture by presenting what teachers should take up as their motto.

This motto, consists of three lines:

Enliven imagination,  
Stand for truth,  
Feel responsibility  
(*The Foundations of Human Experience*,  
Lecture 14).

Anyone who has endeavoured to read and understand Rudolf Steiner's writings will know that he does not make arbitrary comments, yet, here he seems to end an entire series of lectures about developing an anthroposophical understanding of the child, child development and education with only a few words of advice to the teachers. Words which are then summarised into three lines.

In the College of Teachers meetings in Steiner/ Waldorf schools, these three lines

are extended into the following verse, often spoken by teachers:

Imbue thyself with the power of imagination,  
Have courage for the truth,  
Sharpen thy feeling for responsibility of soul. (*Towards the Deepening of Waldorf Education*, 2006, p. 57, Niederhauser, von Kuegelgen, Leber and Tautz, Comp).

The question arises as to whether or not these words actually hold significance and meaning for our teaching and, if so, how? Or, are these words an arbitrary mantra which teachers speak in unison at the beginning or end of each meeting with the rest of the College of Teachers? Do teachers, especially those who are new to the school, truly understand the meaning behind these words, or do they simply copy what the more experienced teachers at the school do because it is expected of them?

On closer reading of the foundational texts, we can discover just how significant these words were, and are, for teachers in describing how their attitude and thinking about their task, their students and the school influences the actual task of education. Throughout his lectures, Steiner makes seemingly subtle mention of a very important aspect which underlies the understanding of all the ideas and viewpoints he presented. These subtle comments are what has been summarised into the 'motto' which Steiner presents at the end of his lectures – comments which relate to the attitude and tasks of the teacher.

"A need for imagination, a sense of truth, and a feeling for responsibility – these are

the three forces that constitute the nerves of pedagogy" (*The Foundations of Human Experience*, Lecture 14).

What does this motto tell us of our attitude and tasks as teachers in a Steiner/ Waldorf school?

### **Imbue Thyself with the Power of Imagination**

Imagination: (n) ability to make mental images of things that may not exist in real life; creative mental ability (Collins Australian Dictionary, 2006).

Steiner tells us that "teachers truly have a categorical imperative! *Keep your imagination alive*" (*The Foundations of Human Experience*, Lecture 14).

On reading *Practical Advice to Teachers* (Steiner, 2000) and *Discussions with Teachers* (Steiner, 1997), we find indications of how this imperative can be achieved.

Steiner tells us that, as teachers, we "must develop in ourselves capacities that allow us to become as absorbed by the subject we teach as the child is by the lesson and, that we must have the ability to transform ourselves in such a way that we ourselves become a child with the children, but not in a childish way, so that the children literally wake up through our lesson" (*Practical Advice to Teachers*, Lecture 8). This can be done if we "try to live directly into our subject so that the children always get the feeling that we are describing something in which we are actually involved. The more life there is in our descriptions, the better the children will work with us" (*Discussions with Teachers*, Discussion 12).

Steiner continues by saying that "the proper mood of life for teachers is always to be able

to return to childhood with everything they experience and with everything they learn ... In doing so, teachers will experience as much delight and intense joy as the children do when they perceive something new. But, Steiner also warns that it is the teacher's soul and spirit that should return to childhood, not the physical manifestation" (*Practical Advice to Teachers*, Lecture 8).

Once we, as teachers, have managed to develop our capacities for working imaginatively, then, says Steiner, "we must teach everything that the children have to learn by stimulating their imagination" (*The Foundations of Human Experience*, Lecture 14) so that "what goes from us to the children in an exciting way gives rise to imagination. Teachers must fill their subject material with imagination" (*The Foundations of Human Experience*, Lecture 14). And again Steiner warns us that "we must take care in education not to drag everything learned by the children into sentimentality, but rather lead what we teach them more towards the workings of practical life, especially in their thirteenth through fifteenth years" (*Practical Advice to Teachers*, Lecture 12).

There are benefits to embracing imagination in our teaching. Steiner tells us that "as we unite with what we teach children, the way we work affects their whole being. We communicate from soul to soul" (*Practical Advice to Teachers*, Lecture 1). ... "Teaching and education depend on what passes from the soul of the teacher to the soul of the child. Education occurs because of what we are, or rather, what we make of ourselves when we are with the children" (*Discussions with Teachers*, Discussion 1). Steiner tells us that "if we remember and never lose sight of this, then we will make progress in our teaching". (*Discussions with Teachers*, Discussion 1 and *Practical Advice to Teachers*, Lecture 1). He

also says that "education through the use of living pictures sows the seeds for development towards the future" (*The Foundations of Human Experience*, Lecture 2).

This means that "we must be conscious that teaching, particularly in a Steiner/ Waldorf school, fulfills something special" (*The Foundations of Human Experience*, Lecture 1). "Education fulfils a great cultural and social deed" (Opening Address, *The Foundations of Human Experience* and *Practical Advice to Teachers*, Lecture 1). "If we can learn to transform what we gain through anthroposophy (the spiritual understanding of the human being and its development) into truly practical instruction then we can accomplish a great cultural deed in education" (Opening Address, *The Foundations of Human Experience*). "Teaching then becomes a social matter, where teachers, by teaching what is appropriate at each age, can enable individuals to assume their positions in life in the right way" (*Practical Advice to Teachers*, Lecture 1). "We must educate children so that they are able to notice the world around them and their fellow human beings. This is the foundation for social life" (*Practical Advice to Teachers*, Lecture 4).

Steiner tells us how we are able to achieve all of this in the second line of the teachers' motto.

### **Have courage for the truth**

Truth: (n) state of being true; true: (adj) in accordance with facts (Collins Australian Dictionary, 2006).

What are the facts to which Steiner refers in his foundational lectures?

The most fundamental fact would have to be the anthroposophical view and understanding of the human being and its development.

Steiner states very early on in *The Foundations of Human Experience* that "as teachers we must bring anthroposophy into our teaching practice and then we can develop a sense for method out of this understanding of the human being" (Opening Address, *The Foundations of Human Experience*). "A renewal of education can only arise out of an inner understanding of the human being" (*Practical Advice to Teachers*, Lecture 6).

Why should the teacher be aware of this anthroposophical view of the child and the child's development as a human being?

Steiner tells us that "teachers must be able to regard life more profoundly; otherwise they will never succeed in handling the growing human being in an appropriate and fruitful way. ... In education we need knowledge of certain mysteries of life. In a certain sense, all teachers must be in possession of (anthroposophical) truths that they cannot directly pass on to the world" (*Practical Advice to Teachers*, Lecture 6).

"To be a real educator and teacher, you cannot avoid entering into the subtleties of the human being" (*Practical Advice to Teachers*, Lecture 12). From an anthroposophical point of view, we "should be aware that physical existence is a continuance of the spiritual, and that what we have to do in education is a continuation of what higher beings have done without our assistance. Our form of education can have the correct attitude only when we are aware that our work with young people is a continuation of what higher beings have done before birth. Before birth, the human being is still in the care of beings above the physical plane. Education can begin when the child is integrated into the cosmic order of the physical plane, and that is when the child begins to breathe physical air. The task of education, under-

stood in a spiritual sense, is to bring the soul-spirit (I-being, astral body and etheric body) into harmony with the temporal (physical) body. ... The task of the teacher is to harmonize these two parts to one another" (*The Foundations of Human Experience*, Lecture 1).

How does this knowledge affect the way we teach?

Through developing an anthroposophical understanding of the child's development we come to understand "the first real attribute of education: the human limbs and chest (will and feeling life) have the task of awakening the head (thinking)". (*The Foundations of Human Experience*, Lecture 11).

"It is necessary from the very beginning, from birth, to educate children through the will because unless we act upon them through the will, we cannot reach the spirit sleeping in their heads." (*The Foundations of Human Experience*, Lecture 11).

Why must this truth, this knowledge be carried as an inner picture by the teacher and why must it affect the way we teach?

Steiner tells us that if we carry an inner picture of these truths then "our methods of teaching will be different. We will begin to see the special tasks of our age and how we must teach so that future humanity can fulfill the developmental impulses prescribed by the universal cosmic order" (*Practical Advice to Teachers*, Lecture 1). "Modern teachers", Steiner says, "must understand that they are not simply teachers of the children entrusted to them. They must also have a social effect that will affect all of humanity so that things do not continually arise that would slowly make people more like animals" (*The Foundations of Human Experience*, Lecture 13).

Once again, Steiner is referring to our moral, social deed, which brings us to the last line of the teachers' motto.

### **Sharpen thy Feeling for Responsibility of Soul**

Responsibility: (n) state of being responsible; responsible: (adj) having control and authority; reporting or accountable (to) (Collins Australian Dictionary, 2006).

As teachers we have a responsibility to our students. On the one hand we are accountable to them for what and how we teach, because everything we (teachers) do has an effect on the souls of the students in our class. On the other hand we must also understand what kind of teacher we need to be in order to have control or authority over the students.

In *The Foundations of Human Experience*, Steiner tells us that we "will not be good teachers if we focus only on what we do and not upon what we are" (*The Foundations of Human Experience*, Lecture 1). He goes further to say that "there can be a major difference between the way one teacher and another enters the classroom ... and it does not depend simply upon whether one teacher is cleverer than another in superficial pedagogical techniques. The main difference in effective teaching comes from the thoughts the teacher has during the entire time of his or her existence and brings into the classroom. A teacher concerned with developing humans affects the students quite differently from a teacher who never thinks about such things. ... When you begin to understand the cosmic meaning of the breathing process and its transformation through education, or the cosmic meaning of the rhythm between sleeping and waking, something within you fights against everything that is merely personality ... everything that forms

the basis of your personality is dampened. When you enter the classroom in this unpretentious state, a relationship is created between you and the students through inner powers" (*The Foundations of Human Experience*, Lecture 1).

These powers are strengthened by the inner work of the teacher in developing and creating imaginative pictures out of the truths we carry in our understanding of the child and child development from an anthroposophical point of view. In this way we can and "must create relationships with the students, even in the face of resistance, from what we make of ourselves. Our primary pedagogical task is that we must first make something of ourselves so that a living inner spiritual relationship exists between the teacher and the children" (*The Foundations of Human Experience*, Lecture 1).

Steiner tells us that "the task of education, understood in a spiritual sense, is to bring the soul-spirit into harmony with the temporal body" (*The Foundations of Human Experience*, Lecture 1) and that we must "use the subjects we teach to develop the soul and physical forces of the individual correctly" (*Practical Advice to Teachers*, Lecture 1).

"Teaching is always a social matter, and we must always consider the appropriate age for developing specific forces, so that their cultivation will enable individuals to assume their positions in life in the right way" (*Practical Advice to Teachers*, Lecture 1).

We will be able to do this if, as teachers, we "hold a comprehensive view of cosmic law. Education requires that the teacher's soul has a relationship to the highest ideals of humanity. In teaching we bring the child the natural world on one side, and on the other, the spiritual world. As human beings, we

have a relationship with the natural world on one side, and the spiritual world on the other, insofar as we are earthly creatures and exist physically between birth and death" (*The Foundations of Human Experience*, Lecture 3).

"The teacher must touch all three forces of the soul (of wish, intent and decision) to regulate and order them. We must work with just what occurs in the depths of human nature when we wish to work in education. Education must work with what lies deep in the soul" (*The Foundations of Human Experience*, Lecture 4).

Steiner gives a picture of the effects of teaching conclusions, judgements and concepts on the child's soul. He says teachers can "ruin the children's souls if you have them memorize finished conclusions; we form children's soul habits through the way you teach them to judge and; when we create concepts, the results of judgements, we act upon the sleeping soul right into the children's bodies" (*The Foundations of Human Experience*, Lecture 9). But, "we will always do the right thing for the children if we endeavour to always cherish a mood of soul that is fresh and healthy" (*Practical Advice to Teachers*, Lecture 14).

Steiner tells us that if we take our responsibilities seriously, then as educators we "must understand the times in which we live because we must also understand the children of those times" (*The Foundations of Human Experience*, Lecture 7) and "teachers must be the driving and stimulating force in the whole educational system" because "the Waldorf school depends on what we do within ourselves, and whether we really allow the things considered to become effective in our own souls" (*Practical Advice to Teachers*, Lecture 14).

### **In conclusion**

Over the two week period of his lectures, Steiner gave many indications and anthroposophical insights regarding the human being, child development and the curriculum. At the time Steiner told the teachers that "these things should be said (and can now be read) many times, but he did not want to make those first teachers (nor the teachers of today) into teaching machines but into free independent teachers" (*Discussions with Teachers*, Discussion 15).

If we thus view the teachers' motto as a reminder of the inner work, striving and attitude of the teacher, as the fundamental basis for everything else the teacher must know about teaching in a Steiner/ Waldorf school, then these few words truly hold significance and meaning in our teaching and will not become an arbitrary mantra to be spoken at meetings of the College of Teachers.

### **References:**

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