

The Four Teacher Generations as Exemplified in Foreign Language Teaching

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In the Christmas 2017 edition of the *Journal* for teachers, I referred to the three generations of teachers in the last hundred years of Waldorf education. In the age of individualism there is a tendency to forget the importance of working together in a group. The occupation of Waldorf teacher leads to a very special form of community. Its work rests on the connection with the work of the trinity of the third hierarchy: the power of the angels enhances and refines our individual action, the power of the archangels makes the joint activity of a college of teachers more productive, and the power of the archai puts its imprint on the work of a whole period of time.

Seen individually, a teacher does not belong to any generation; they belong to themselves and their work is based on their personal interpretation of Waldorf education and its basis in anthroposophy. But as a colleague in a specific school, they are part of the spiritual profile of that school. Every school develops its own style; one might put an emphasis on crafts, another is more concerned with the musical arts, another one again has developed its provision for special education. The work of each individual teacher is thus given its own colouring.

A similar thing applies with regard to the generations. Teaching was different in a Waldorf school before the Second World War compared to the 1980s. When PCs and smartphones appeared on the scene, it was different again. Now, after one hundred

years of Waldorf education, a new generation of teachers, which is at the beginning of its activity and has to work together with the teachers of an older generation, is coming to the fore, whereby each one individually subscribes to the generation to which they feel they to belong.

Questions and conflicts arise in the encounter between these two groups. Older colleagues keep saying the young teachers often don't know what they want, their goals are vague. They don't work enough with the lectures and writings of Rudolf Steiner. They often mix in, without thinking, elements of the transhumanist image of the human being, making "our" system of education wither. Their younger colleagues, in contrast, feel badly looked after and abandoned. They find the work in the teachers' meetings boring and lacking in spirituality. They feel – frequently in Germany – curbed in their power of initiative.

At a conference in Kassel, Germany at the end of April, the foreign language teachers who were present faced up to this problem. We fundamentally saw four possibilities for the future of Waldorf education:

- 1) tear it down and start again;
- 2) rebuild or renovate;
- 3) refurbish or find a new style;
- 4) continue as before.

We soon discovered that these four possibilities are all justified in parts if we discover where any given one can help our teaching to progress.

If we look at the field of language from a holistic perspective, we encounter three areas which are important for holistic language teaching appropriate to our time.

- On the one hand, speaking a foreign language means entering into a relationship with a people and its cultural values. People in Spain live differently from people in Russia and the national temperament is reflected in the language. In this area the following questions arose: How can language teaching contribute to promoting peace and reciprocal respect between the peoples on earth and their languages? Particularly as Rudolf Steiner seriously warned against the right to the self-determination of peoples – something that today is no longer called into question – when, at the time, Woodrow Wilson raised it in his fourteen points. But Steiner suggested a different way of establishing world peace.¹ As early as 1916, he spoke with Herbert Hahn about future foreign language teaching from this perspective. To what extent has the language teaching of the last hundred years pursued this approach?

- A second point concerns health. In recent decades there has been such an accumulation of language deficiencies in children between the ages of 2 and 10 that the health insurance companies in Germany have long been sounding the alarm and are offering programmes to combat these deficiencies which are categorized as causes of subsequent illness.² At this physical bodily level, the question arose as to the contribution which language

teaching can make to the healthy development of the speaking human being in childhood.

- The third point is connected with the soul level, with the level of communication. In the media age communication has become something quite different from what it was a hundred years ago when the church bells still announced the midday break for the rural population. Is communication becoming more superficial because of modern technical tools or not? Who communicates with whom in modern electronic communication and how much electronics is needed in holistic language teaching; how much can it cope with?

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, there was a great turnaround in language teaching.³ Is the subject facing another change of direction arising out of the needs of the time? Does dealing with language today require a different emphasis, indeed considerable innovation, arising from the spiritual, physical and soul levels? What do young teachers say about this?

What kind of language teaching do children and young people need at the present time? The present is not a free-floating point in constant transformation which appears in our consciousness. It is more than that. The present can be understood as the flowing together of a stream of time from the past with a stream of time from the future. "Let the future rest on what has passed; let what has passed obtain a sense of what is to come for

1 An understanding of one's own ethnicity; see Rudolf Steiner, CW 121, *The Mission of Individual Folk Souls*.

2 There is a good up-to-date overview in: *Sprache, das Lebenselixier des Kindes*, Rainer Patzlaff, Stuttgart, 2017, Chapter 19.

3 Wilhelm Viëtor, *Der Sprachunterricht muss umkehren!*, Heilbronn, 1886.

powerful existence in the present" reads the Capricorn verse of the Twelve Cosmic Moods.⁴

Let the Future Rest on What has Passed

What already exists for spiritual foreign language teaching? There are primarily two lec-

tures in *Discussions with Teachers*.⁵ In these lectures from the year 1919, we can find eleven topics for organising foreign language teaching in a way that meets the demands of the time:

Working economically	Cultivating pronunciation
Expressing our own thoughts in the foreign language	It would be nice to have the thought of one pupil formulated by another in a different language
Conversely: Discuss a topic in the pupil's own language and then the child should retell what was discussed in the foreign language.	The pupils should have conversations with one another with the teacher only offering guidance.
Telling a story	A great deal of reading
	Homework
Grammar	Cultivating the reflex-like movement in language

For decades, these indications did not mean a great deal to quite a number of new teachers and many students. They appeared harmless to them. There is often a failure to understand the educational value of first telling a story, something that is urgently recommended, particularly in foreign language teaching. Some students ask themselves, for example, why they should tell a story and then follow up by reading the text. The pupils would know the story once it had been told, so why was it necessary to read it afterwards? Telling the story first was thus counterproductive. This attitude comes from a reductionist view of language which is common in modern education.

Language as the medium in which to express thoughts is only the last phase of linguistic expression. Before that, language, in accordance with the developmental stage of the child, is pictorial and touches the soul more. Being touched emotionally in this way through language is required more than ever by every child in the second seven-year period, particularly in the media age. It is only when an experienced teacher tells the future teacher what can be achieved with a differentiated understanding of language that the latter can become enthusiastic about it. Or we have to acquire the background knowledge to understand the dimension of such methodological stratagems.⁶

4 Rudolf Steiner, CW 40a.

5 Rudolf Steiner, CW 295: Lectures 9 and 10.

6 E.g. Rudolf Steiner, CW 162, 18 July 1915; CW 224, 28 April 1923.

Only then do we notice how relevant such indications from Steiner are. Only then can the future aspects which each new teacher brings with them rest on past events. This gives expression to an expectation: young teachers are interested in what already exists, be it through being told about it, be it through their own reading. Throwing everything overboard without any knowledge of what already exists and organising lessons on the basis of our own feelings would be arbitrary. In the verse about the Twelve Cosmic Moods quoted above it says: "In inward life's resistance, let cosmic beings' vigilance be strengthened". Harmony must arise between what the new teachers bring with them out of their personal destiny and what the world (for the teacher and the pupils are part of the world) requires at any given moment.

Let What has Passed Obtain a Sense of What is to Come for a Powerful Existence in the Present

The "old" teachers also have tasks to manage: If they think they can pass on their successes in teaching to the "young ones" by calling on the latter to organise their teaching in the same way as themselves, then they are in for a shock. We have to obtain a sense of what the young teachers want and help them to turn these more or less clear felt goals into powerful action in the present. This is a path and it means that the young teacher searches, tests, fails, and finds success ... with the support of the experienced teacher who undoubtedly once went through the same process!

We know from anthroposophy that thinking is old intent and intent is young thinking.⁷ Thus a young teacher will, to begin with, do things in lessons they have thought about insufficiently or with too much precision. Such practical intent ignites corrective un-

derstanding. Intent ages into understanding. It is – at a higher level – the same as with small children: they do something and look at their mother hoping for approval or disapproval from the figure of authority. In looking back at the lesson together with their mentor, the young teacher should be able to smile cheerfully about this or that clumsiness because they have identified what they will do differently the next time. Conversely, the young teacher might hesitate in looking back at the way they did something in their teaching to know whether it was good or bad; and it is the role of the mentor to encourage them to continue because the mentor has discovered the beginnings of an individual style in the work of the new teacher which must be supported at all cost, even if success is not yet in sight.

With regard to artists – and teachers are supposed to be artists in education – we refer to the early work, main work and late work. It is the task of the mentor to discover the young Van Goghs, grant them their early work and help them to achieve their main work. When mentors have mastered the last line of the quoted verse of the Twelve Cosmic Moods – "Let the past bear what is to come" – then the new teacher can develop their work in the present.

Powerful Existence in the Present

If we Waldorf teachers, young and old, wrestle with the past and the future, then we can freely deal with the demands of the time as set out at the beginning in the spiritual, soul and physical regard and create the kind of lessons that are needed by the world, the pupils. The fact that this cannot be done from one day to the next is obvious. The meetings, conferences and advanced training events organised in our school movement, in

⁷ Rudolf Steiner, CW 158, 22 November 1914.

which such dialogue can be cultivated, can become a blessing which includes the influence of the higher beings and ensures the renewal and continuation of our system of education.

Then the common thread of anthroposophy can continue to be spun from one generation to the next and knitted into a variety of coats for lessons enabling good and contemporary foreign language teaching.