

Waldorf schools

Children in the Czech Republic usually gain elementary education at elementary schools. Compulsory school attendance takes nine years, from the age of 6 till the age of 15. However, children may receive this level of education at various types of schools that can also utilize different types of educational programmes.

One possibility is to attend an alternative school where the lessons and the approach to children are different from some classical primary and secondary schools. One of the alternative schools is the Waldorf School. The impulse behind Waldorf education is cultural renewal—an impulse for the future that Rudolf Steiner felt could be fostered through a new understanding of the individual and community. Waldorf has become the largest private school movement in the world, and Waldorf methods are now being taken up by a growing number of homeschooling families and public charter and magnet schools all over the world.

Petrash (32) states that one of the principles of Waldorf education is that “all subjects are on the same level in the curriculum of Waldorf pedagogy”. On that account all subjects are included from first to ninth class for all pupils compulsorily. Girls take part in working with wood and metal, boys knit and crochet. “The sense is to give all children a wide unspecialized basic, thus each subject develops partial aspects of a wide range of human qualities” (Petrash 33). Another important consideration, which is taken into account in the curriculum, is to pervade various topics. There is an effort to build bridges among particular branches of study and subjects, to introduce children to the world in its relationship to people.

Waldorf School keeps psycho-physiological patterns in the daily schedule. Rather than being given letter grades and made to feel superior or deficient, each Waldorf student is encouraged to do his or her best work, and each child is valued as a capable learner (Petrash 98). In the morning till ten or eleven there are subjects which are difficult to concentrate on. These subjects are maths, mother tongue and literature, physics, chemistry, biology, history and geography which are learnt as the main subjects. Every day the lesson starts with a two-hour lesson block, where one subject (e.g. mathematical operation, building a house or history of Greece) is taught for three or four weeks. The daily lesson block is not monotonous. It starts with a rhythmical part, which wakes children up. Then children practise

subject matters, learn new things and write in their exercise-books. The block usually finishes with a story or the fairy tale.

The subjects, which need regular repetition, e.g. languages, needlework, drawing, painting, physical education, woodworking, are divided into other lessons and they are repeated every week. First learners work with the head, then with feelings and lastly with hands and movement.

The pupils are not given marks during all their school attendance; they are not compared to each other according to their results. The only competition which the child attempts is the competition with himself or herself, the active endeavour to improve himself or herself. The pupils' improvements, abilities and experience are expressed in the written report twice a year.

Another specific thing is that pupils do not have any textbooks. The teacher creates his own textbook and each child produces a beautifully written and illustrated 'main lesson book' for each subject (Petrasch 35). The books can only be used as additional material but not as the main source of lessons. Gifted children in one subject area can do extra work according to their interest, or they might be encouraged to help classmates, turning their gift to a social purpose rather than promoting egoism (Petrasch 102).

This way of education demands extraordinary abilities of teachers, the special preparedness and education above all. He/she must not only know his subject and theme but he should be able to change it to such a form that they can encourage a child in each particular evolutionary situation. The teacher should be in the never-ending process of self-education and self-upbringing. The class teacher works with each child through an eight or nine-year relationship, where the teacher is able to draw out the child's strengths and focus more consistently and intensively on the weaker areas. The Waldorf-methods teacher will adjust the pedagogical approach year to year.

Works Cited:

Petrash, Jack. *Understanding Waldorf Education: Teaching from the Inside Out*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

“Waldorf Education.” *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*. 1 Jan 2009. 1 Jan 2009.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waldorf_Education>.

Appendix 1:

The map of Waldorf schools in the Czech Republic (Waldorfská pedagogika v ČR 2006)



