

WHY WALDORF TEACHING IS THE GREATEST PROFESSION

by Henning Kullak-Ublick

Henning Kullak-Ublick is a Waldorf teacher in northern Germany and a board member of the Bund der Freien Waldorfschulen (German Waldorf School Association). This article, "Warum Waldorflehrer der tollste Berufist," originally appeared in Erziehungskunst (The Art of Education), May 2011 in German and was translated for "Waldorf Today" by David Kennedy.

Being a teacher not only involves professional and technical knowledge, but imagination and fantasy, unbridled interest in the world, and especially the courage to explore new things together with the children. Only those who love the world can reach children.

April 23, 1919:

The First World War is over and Germany is economically and politically on the rocks. In a Stuttgart factory tobacco bundles are stacked everywhere, from which Waldorf-Astoria brand cigarettes will be rolled. The workers are sitting on the bundles and a speaker calls out to them: *"For more than a century, this mantra has echoed through humanity: Freedom, Equality, Fraternity. Much was written in the nineteenth century regarding the sheer incompatibility of these three words. They were right. Why? These concepts were buried by the hypnotic effects of an emerging centralized federal government. Only when these three words, these three impulses: the freedom of the spiritual life, the equality of the democratic state, and the brotherhood of the association of economic life are put in place, only then can they their true meaning be fulfilled."*

After the lecture, the workers turn to their boss Emil Molt and ask him to set up a school based upon these principles for their children, so that they would be better prepared for their future. This was how the first Waldorf school came into being. Rudolf Steiner, who gave the lecture, took over the management of the school and developed a revolutionary educational concept that focused on training the teacher's power of observation to replace standardized curricula. It was radical and took into account and valued the developmental capacity of everyone who was in the school, whether a student, teacher or parent.

March 23, 2011:

In the Arab World a citizens' movement has arisen overnight. The Japanese are fighting with the forces of nature and an uncontrollable technology. The Earth's axis has shifted and the global financial crisis has severely tested our faith in the hand of economic egoism. 900 million people are connected with Facebook, the first birds are chirping outside and so many people in Germany voted for the Green party in the recent election that all the politicians are rubbing their eyes.

[Two] vignettes from the past century. The world is changing so quickly that it can make you dizzy. If we educate children today, we do so for a time and a world that we cannot imagine. A simple extrapolation of today's world into the future is misleading. The "knowledge" of humanity doubled between 1800 and 1900. Today "it" doubles in just four years, in the computing world in only six months. By means of modern media we can not only "summon" this "knowledge" whenever we want to, but we are also now connected with the whole world like never before and we also know more about one another than we ever did. With the sheer enormity of all the "knowledge" at our disposal, it loses its meaning. What counts is not just the amount of knowledge, but the relationship that each individual forms with it.

Only if we love the world can we educate.

It is more important than ever to create situations for children and adolescents, in which they can engage wholeheartedly with the world and have truly-saturated encounters with it. For teachers, this includes not only keeping “up-to-date”, but above all, working with fantasy, an unbounded interest in the world and the courage to blaze trails together with the children, on which they can discover a new way for the future. We must abandon the idea that teachers are there to fill the children with facts and lifeless knowledge. Being a teacher means mastering the art of relationships, both in relation to each individual child (which can sometimes take time), as well as in the teacher’s relationship to the world, through which the children can experience and understand the world. Only those who love the world can educate children.

One of the best experiences that a teacher can have is realizing that that every child becomes a mystery, who learns in her own way to set foot on the earth, to develop ideas and to begin to do something with them.

In the January 2011 issue of *The Art of Education* Ute Hallaschka wrote that what is new about globalization is the opportunity for humanity to reach an understanding of itself. Every individual is created anew, when she has to ask herself, in a global context, “*Who am I and who are you?*”

This question, in which the entire world is included in “you”, can only be answered by those who have learned to discover the unexpected. What better place to practice this than in a community of people who know each other and undertake this journey of discovery together? This applies not only to a single class, but also to a college of teachers, the parent body, indeed the whole school community. Waldorf Education is a social art; it is about transforming the world through interest in one another.