

# **Ethics within a Spiritual/ Metaphysical World View towards Integral Value-based Education European Educationists: Steiner and Montessori**

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## **Abstract**

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*Among the Western pioneers of integral value-based education, two authors deserve special attention in Europe: Steiner and Montessori. This paper outlines a common underlying background in both of them—Philosophical Idealism and Theosophy. According to the author, it is this special idealistic sensitiveness that compels the two renowned educationists to react against the technocratic and utilitarian mainstream school system and suggest new avenues for the pedagogic practice in a holistic, humanistic and even spiritual horizon which overcomes the valueless soulless patterns of modernity. If mainstream schooling is based upon a certain world view, which is materialistic and mechanistic, Steiner and Montessori's pedagogic innovation is based upon another world view, which is humanistic and spiritual. In spite of different paths in professional terms and different personal contexts, they both put forward the same fundamental pedagogic principles deriving from this common underlying paradigm. From this point of view, the needed caution from mainstream schooling while approaching their philosophy of education should not overlook the contribution that they have made and they still can make to transform the educational system for better.*

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## INTRODUCTION

It is commonly agreed that Steiner and Montessori would be the pioneers of integral or progressive pedagogies in Europe, and Dewey and Kilpatrick in North America. This paper tries to expound the main points of Steiner and Montessori's pedagogic innovation which strongly makes the case for the humanistic foundation of education — and even spiritual. At the same time, it shows that there is a common background in Steiner, Montessori and even Dewey—philosophical idealism, which induces the three of them to react against the mainstream school system, essentially technocratic and utilitarian like the civilisation that has produced it. It is this special idealistic sensitiveness which propels these major figures of holistic or alternative education to open new avenues in front of the alienating reductionism operated by modern schooling.

The progressive pedagogy of the European pioneers — like that of the North-American precursors would be deeply akin to the integral value-based philosophy of education of Indian sages, such as Vivekananda, Tagore, Aurobindo, Krishnamurti or Sathya Sai Baba. Unfortunately, the Western world has massively ignored the contribution of India, not only in the educational sector but also in general. That is why the renowned scholar, Prof. R. Panikkar, always denounced the cultural imperialism of the West while claiming for an intercultural dialogue that has been rare till now.

In fact, the European pioneers of integral education have also been ignored in their own continent for many decades. From a sharp hostility at the beginning towards an initial aperture in the last years, the educational philosophy of Steiner and Montessori is still revolutionary — in the deepest sense because the mainstream system still goes in the opposite direction — as a reflection of the whole civilisation. There are more Waldorf and Montessori schools today, and some governments have paid more attention than others to their proposals.

But in general terms mainstream schooling is still what both Steiner and Montessori denounced, and their pedagogic innovation is still valid and it is still waiting to be seriously implemented in the whole educational system — not only in a bunch of private Waldorf or Montessori schools. This may require adaptation, flexibility and prudence; still there is something in both Steiner and Montessori that is important for the whole educational system, not only for a minority of special parents searching for something different for their children.

The most important today would be the deeper message of Steiner and Montessori's pedagogic and philosophical insights. And this is what we try to elucidate in this paper. Certainly, these renowned educationists have had some influence on Western educational systems, and a number of schools

have been created following their inspiration. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that the mainstream school system has not changed in significant terms yet — especially in Europe; it is still basically academic and utilitarian, and ultimately technocratic; it continues to structure a sharp reductionism in front of the multidimensional nature of humanity and the cosmos. From this point of view, European and Western educational systems are still essentially modern, that is, materialistic and technocratic, not holistic yet — as quantum physics would certainly prefer. In this horizon it may be stated that something ‘pour épater les bourgeois’: integral education is quantum whereas mainstream schooling is Newtonian. There is something epistemologically profound in this philosophical provocation. In Steiner’s words:

“Individuals are seldom brought into touch with their own humanity.

Anthroposophy, which is based on a real and comprehensive understanding of the human being, would hear this heartfelt appeal coming from all sides.

When we have genuine knowledge of a human being we see that he or she possesses three clearly distinguished members: physical body, soul and spirit.”<sup>1</sup>

In this heartfelt appeal, Europe is probably more reluctant than North America to open the mainstream system to holistic or

progressive pedagogies. For this reason, we must say today that the pedagogic innovation of Steiner and Montessori, like that of Dewey and Kilpatrick, is still a source of inspiration in order to transform the mainstream educational systems from technocracy and utilitarianism towards a more holistic, humanistic, ethical and even spiritual vision of education and hence humanity.

In this perspective, the notion of paradigm is essential to grasp not only all the depth of Steiner and Montessori but more specifically their criticism of mainstream schooling and hence their alternative proposals. As already mentioned, their philosophical background would be Philosophical Idealism in general and Theosophy or the Theosophical Society in particular — from which Steiner withdrew to create his own frame and organisation, Anthroposophy. This is particularly important to understand their pedagogic innovation.

Let us take experiential learning for instance. In the modern world it would be usually understood in cognitive terms only — see Dewey for instance; but for Steiner and Montessori, as it was for Socrates and Plato, as it would be for all Theosophists, experiential learning has another deeper dimension beyond the mere cognitive level, which is metaphysical and spiritual: know yourself and you will know the universe and the gods.

<sup>1</sup> Steiner R. 1997. *The Roots of Education* (Foundations of Waldorf Education). pp. 13–14. Anthroposophic Press, New York.

Here Theosophists, such as Steiner or Montessori would be deeply coherent with the Vedic education of India and the Vedantic '*gurukula*'—community of master and disciples exemplified by Shankara and his disciples — something deeply akin to Platonism by the way.

Steiner makes it clear that modern civilisation is based upon a materialistic world view deriving from scientism rather than science. In front of this, his world view is spiritual and metaphysical, and he is aware of the gap between the society and himself.<sup>2</sup>

"The world is permeated by spirit, and true knowledge of the world must be permeated by spirit as well."<sup>3</sup>

Precisely for this reason academic or governmental reports that do appreciate positive aspects of Waldorf education are still cautious when facing the possible implementation of Waldorf strategies into the mainstream sector. This kind of report manifests the matter of the paradigm or world view, which is not at all the same in Waldorf schools and in mainstream schooling.

For instance, the report of the University of West of England on Waldorf education warns:

"Adoption of Steiner practices in mainstream education has to be approached with caution. Transferring practices between schools of differing philosophies is neither straightforward nor in all cases appropriate, and may not achieve the expected consequences

because they are removed from the supportive school context in which they originate.

Transferring practices between schools of differing philosophies of education means in depth in philosophical terms transferring practices of differing paradigms or worldviews.

Steiner and Montessori defended an integral form of education from another paradigm, let us call it metaphysical or Idealistic — form Philosophical Idealism and Theosophy; certainly not from the materialistic and utilitarian world view prevailing in the modern age. We want to insist on this crucial issue in this paper as we have done in other works through the study of integral philosophies of education both in the West and the East.

We also want to make it clear that philosophically the deeper background of Steiner and Montessori would not be Theosophy but Philosophical Idealism, this *Philosophia Perennis* that Huxley studied in his famous works and fascinated major quantum physicists — especially in its Indian Vedic formulation. Some limitations may be found in the concrete contents of modern Theosophy, but this is not the real matter. The fundamental issue at stake is the epistemological and metaphysical depth of Philosophical Idealism — both Socratic/Platonist or Vedic/Vedantic, or in any other tradition or school of thought. It is this philosophical depth what

<sup>2</sup> Cf Steiner R., 1997, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Steiner R., 1997, p. 29.

brings quantum physicists to the convergence of science and spirituality. It is not a matter of religion — in the orthodox sense and even less in the mere sociological meaning; it is a matter of reality, and this is what quantum physics and other branches of new science have realised — see relational science, new biology, epigenetics, sophrology, etc.

While elaborating a new educational project for 20 years between India, Europe and North America, which is called “International Education for a New World”, the author of these pages has studied the educational philosophy of the pioneers of integral value-based education in Europe, North America and India, especially from this philosophical background provided by Philosophical Idealism. He has also visited many schools implementing their pedagogic proposals in the three continents. In this article the author tries to bring out his observations and conclusions from 20 years of field work together with the more scholarly research and philosophical work hoping that the readers will find it inspirational or useful to strive towards a more humanistic kind of education.

As Kant emphasised, education is a historical process. Integral value education is even more clearly a collective endeavour that constitutes in fact the very process of human evolution, or to put it in Aurobindo’s words, the adventure of consciousness on Earth.

## **THE HEIRS OF THEOSOPHY**

### **Rudolf Steiner and Anthroposophy /Waldorf Schools.<sup>4</sup>**

Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) is a fascinating figure of the twentieth century, philosopher and educationist, member of the Theosophical Society and later founder of Anthroposophy and Waldorf Schools, probably the most mature project of integral education in the Western world with a wide scope of implementation (around 2,500 schools including kindergarten). Through Theosophy he was in fact an heir of Goethe, Romanticism and the long tradition of European Philosophical Idealism going back to Plato, Pythagoras and Orphism.<sup>5</sup>

- In the first phase of his life and work, more philosophically oriented, Steiner attempted a synthesis between science and spirituality also outlined by the forerunners of quantum physics in the West and Swami Vivekananda in India. Through his spiritual science, Steiner tried to provide a connection between the cognitive path of modern science and the Socratic/mystical quest of Philosophical Idealism and spiritual philosophy.
- In the second phase, starting around 1907, he collaborated in a diversity of artistic media, developing the dance called ‘eurythmy’ and built the famous

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that few critical biographies and scholarly works have been published about Steiner apart from the hagiography characteristic of Anthroposophical organisations or Waldorf Schools.

<sup>5</sup> Cf Ullrich H., 1994.

Goetheanum, a cultural centre for all the arts.

- In the third phase, beginning after the First World War, he established different practical endeavours, like biodynamic agriculture, anthroposophical medicine and mainly Waldorf Schools. Steiner became the Head of the German and Austrian sections of the Theosophical Society in 1902. Quite soon, some differences manifested between Steiner and the Society.
- First, the Theosophical Society had a broad open spirit open to intercultural dialogue, and made an invaluable contribution towards a reappraisal of Hinduism and Buddhism in a colonial era that had despised these major spiritual traditions — the most prominent figures of Theosophy even supported the independence of India. Steiner's worldview was limited; without much interest in the Eastern traditions, he rather closed himself within the limits of the European esoteric tradition and Christianity exclusively.
- Secondly, the leaders of the Society, A. Besant and Ch. Leadbeater, recognised the purity and the depth of a young boy from Madras Beach, J. Krishnamurti. Though their expectation for the young boy to become the vehicle of an immortal master, Maitreya, and a World Teacher were not totally or exactly accomplished, still their intuition was basically

sound. The older Krishnamurti always recognised as his contacts with the Masters had been totally real, and nobody can deny that J. Krishnamurti became one of the most brilliant philosophers and sages of the modern age, a true spiritual master Malgre Lui, and finally a real world teacher, though not in the way the Society had initially thought of, but in a purely Socratic way, that is, the most genuine. However, Steiner was pretty Eurocentric, and could not so easily accept an Indian boy becoming the World Teacher. This illustrious thinker and educationist could not be aware of his own limitation from this point of view, which implied an unconscious adoption of the cultural imperialism of his age.

Steiner formally cut with the Theosophical Society in 1912/1913, and formed a new organisation, Anthroposophy, where Steiner could feel at ease becoming somewhat the pope of his own church, centred on European culture and Christianity, without Besants or Leadbeaters reminding him about other spiritual traditions like Hinduism or Buddhism, and without Indian boys being candidates to such high positions as World Teacher.

In any case, he pursued the typically theosophical search for the fulfilment of spiritual life. Like the Romantics, Steiner suffered from the demystification of the world operated by the modern age.



“The central theme of Steiner’s work is the inner perception of the spiritual world and the spiritualisation of every area of human activity.”<sup>6</sup>

In 1919, Steiner founded the first Waldorf School in Stuttgart. At the same time, he lectured more than ever, and the Goetheanum expanded its cultural activities. In 1923, he founded the School of Spiritual Science, intended to be “the soul of the Anthroposophical Society”. After the First World War, he proposed radical social reforms, namely his famous Threefold Social Order, in which the cultural, political and economic realms would be largely independent, whereas, according to Steiner, their fusion had generated inflexibility leading to the catastrophe of World War I.<sup>7</sup>

From 1919/1921, the new National-Socialist Party (Nazi) rapidly gained strength in Germany, and its leaders, such as Adolf Hitler and Dietrich Eckart, started attacking Steiner. Apparently, it was an obvious cultural gap between them that produced the Nazi aggressiveness. In depth, Hitler was convinced that Steiner had supernatural powers — oriented towards the light, while the Nazi leader was very interested in getting such kind of powers but in a totally opposite orientation, towards dark forces. This sinister spectrum of German politics and culture declared a ‘war against Steiner’. The Goetheanum was burnt, and Steiner’s lectures were object of violent assaults amidst threatening.

After a long period of illness, Steiner died in 1925, leaving a fascinating life devoted to spiritual philosophy, a new holistic paradigm and integral education. He was also one of the first intellectuals to seriously warn Germans and Europeans about the danger of Hitler and National-Socialism; his warning was more than justified with all what developed after his death.

### **Steiner’s Integral Education: Waldorf Schools**

Already as a young man, Steiner defended the independence of educational institutions from governmental control. In 1907, he wrote an essay on “Education in the Light of Spiritual Science”, where he described the major phases of child development that would later become the very foundation of Waldorf’s pedagogy. In 1919, Emil Molt invited him to lecture to his factory in Stuttgart, the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory. Out of these lectures came a new school, the first Waldorf School, pioneer of a movement that amounts to circa 2500 schools and kindergartens at the beginning of the twenty-first century all around the globe.

In 1922, Professor M. Mackenzie invited Steiner to present his pedagogic ideas at the famous Oxford University, which would launch the creation of Waldorf Schools in the United Kingdom.

“In contrast to the path taken by Dewey and Montessori, who sought to establish their New Education

<sup>6</sup> Ullrich H., 1994, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Cf Steiner R., 1995, p. 7.

on recent ideas of empirical child psychology, Steiner based his educational plan entirely on his cosmic spiritualistic anthropology.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Main Features of Waldorf Education**

- A humanistic approach;
- Integral or holistic pedagogy;
- Child-centred and value-centred philosophy;
- The basal role of ethics in education;
- Interdisciplinary spirit;
- Emphasis on the pedagogic potential of all the arts and
- Stressing the role of imagination and creativity.

Steiner aimed at the formation of free moral integrated human beings in front of the reductionism and mechanism of mainstream schooling. Freedom applies not only to the children, but also to the schools and the teachers, who have a considerable amount of freedom to define the curriculum.

“Waldorf educators are particularly concerned with the development of the soul of the school-age child.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Steiner’s Model of Child Development**

- **Early childhood (from birth to 7),** when learning is basically experiential, sensory-based and imitative through playing.

- **Elementary school (7 to 14),** embracing late childhood and puberty/early adolescence.
- **During late adolescence, after 14, the secondary school’s pedagogy** can develop conceptual/abstract thinking and moral judgement, though it has already been prepared through the elementary school, especially after 11.

Most of Waldorf schools are autonomous institutions that do not follow an official curriculum. In spite of inevitable problems with the perennial will of governments to control education, Waldorf schools have been able to survive and develop, offering one the most comprehensive and mature systems of integral education in the Western world.

And despite being so different from mainstream schooling, Waldorf schools have been increasingly appreciated at the scholarly and even governmental level.

As the study made by the University of Arizona concludes:

“The empirical research on Waldorf education is surprisingly limited given its nearly 100 years history. However, the available studies suggest a positive impact of Waldorf on a number of cognitive and social outcome measures.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Ullrich H. AND RUDOLF STEINER. 1994. Prospects. *The Quarterly Review of Comparative Education*, UNESCO. Vol. XXIV. No. 3/4, pp. 5–6.

<sup>9</sup> Uhrmacher P.B. 1995. Uncommon Schooling. A Historical Look at Rudolf Steiner, Anthroposophy and Waldorf Education. Curriculum Inquiry, University of Toronto. Vol. 25. No. 4. p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> A.L. Larrison, A.J. DALY AND C. VAN VOOREN. 2012. “Twenty Years and Counting. A Look at Waldorf in the Public Sector Using Online Sources.” *Current Issues in Education*. Arizona State University. Vol. 15. No. 3. p. 2.



## M. MONTESSORI'S SCHOOLS

**Maria Montessori** (1870–1952) was an Italian physician and educationist who developed a special pedagogic system, the Montessori Method, as an attempt to provide a more integral and humanistic kind of education in reaction to the mainstream school system of her time — and to some extent of ours too.<sup>11</sup>

Montessori's pedagogic system arises from realising what is “the child's true normal nature”. From this point of view, Montessori develops on modern academic grounds one of the major themes anticipated by Rousseau and the Romantics. Montessori observed with a scientific eye what happens when young children are given freedom in an environment prepared towards their self-directed learning. Hence, the method aims at reproducing through a pedagogic frame that is experimental observation, to unfold in the school their true natural way of being — called “**normalisation**”.

“Montessori borrowed the term ‘normalisation’ from the field of anthropology. It is a technical term which means “becoming a contributing member of society” (...) According to Montessori, the phenomenon of normalisation refers to the process of healthy development

whereby children regularly and freely choose constructive activities based upon their interests, which then leads to their development of the capacity to concentrate (...) she believed that this state was “the true nature of the child”.<sup>12</sup>

- In this pedagogic system, the main role of the teacher — sometimes called guide — consists of removing the obstacles interfering with this natural development of the child and his or her natural inclination towards their own self-directed learning process.
- Another main function of the ‘guide’ would be to carefully observe the children in their own developmental process. The teacher must believe in the child.
- The teacher will also provide lessons, where he or she will show how to use the various self-teaching materials or will correct any kind of misbehaviour.
- The teacher — compared to a gardener takes care of the child as a soul.

In general, the Montessori Method has been basically implemented with young children (till seven), though some pedagogic application has also occurred with elder groups of age.

In terms of history of educational philosophy, we can understand

<sup>11</sup> Cf Bagby J.H. 2007. “Montessori Education and Practice. A Review of the Literature. 1996–2006”, *Montessori Life*. Vol. 16. No. 1.

Bagby J.H. and N. Jones. 2010. “Montessori Education and Practice. A Review of the Literature. 2007–2009”, *Montessori Life*. Vol. 22. No. 1.

Bagby J.H., K. WELLS, K. EDMONDSON AND L. THOMPSON. 2014. “Montessori Education and Practice. A Review of the Literature. 2010–2013”, *Montessori Life*. Vol. 26. No. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Lloyd K.M. 2008. “An Analysis of Maria Montessori's Theory of Normalization in Light of Emerging Research in Self-Regulation”. Thesis, Oregon State University. pp. 17–18.

Montessori's reaction against the mainstream schooling of her time — and partly today which overlooked the nature of the child and the characteristics of the different age groups, while imposing from college down to primary school the lecture method on purely academic grounds.

However, the development of educational philosophy will have to examine with a sensible mind whether Montessori's innovation does not sometimes fall into the opposite extreme — some of her followers rather than herself, which may bring to an erosion of the pedagogic role of the adult. Mankind always shifts like a pendulum from one extreme to another. Montessori's method should invite educators to find a middle path between the overwhelming imposition of the adult — as in the modern mainstream schooling and the dismissal of the adult's pedagogic role — as it has sometimes happened in the last decades under an aura of progressive pedagogy. Montessori herself insisted that children need a structured pedagogic environment, and she felt that Rousseau did not understand it properly and hence misunderstood the child's freedom.

When dealing with Montessori's succession, it is important to make it clear that the Montessori Method does not constitute a trade mark for which it has been adopted by a diversity of organisations differing in their interpretation and implementation.

Montessori borrowed the experimental method called Scientific Education, which was developed in the nineteenth century by the French physicians Jean-Marc Gaspard Itard and Edouard Seguin. Dr Itard became famous for trying to educate the wild boy from Aveyron and worked with handicapped children; Dr Seguin continued his work and developed especially designed self-teaching materials. Both Itard and Seguin were important for the treatment of mentally impaired children, and Montessori followed them in her research on mental retardation. In front of the brutal treatment that mentally handicapped children received at that time, Montessori defended after the two French physicians a more pedagogic and more humane policy towards these children. In fact, it was her study of children's mental illnesses that motivated her to study education in general.<sup>13</sup>

In 1907, she established a care centre for young children in a low-income district of Rome. In this Casa dei Bambini — Children's House, she put into practice Seguin's method, and soon realised the positive results. From this experience she wrote several books and conducted training programmes. At the end of her life, she explored how her method could be extended to secondary education and even college.<sup>14</sup>

Although Montessori evolved her method from direct experience and

<sup>13</sup> Cf Gutek, G.L. 2004. In Montessori M. (ED.), *The Montessori Method*, ed by G.L. Gutek, Rowman and Littlefield, New York, p. 710.

Cf Montessori M., 2004, Chapter 2.

<sup>14</sup> Cf Montessori M., 2004, Chapter 3.

from scientific research, not from any philosophical background or specific theory, it is clear that her pedagogic orientation is deeply akin to Rousseau and the philosophical school of Naturalism among the major trends of educational philosophy. She got acquainted with the more progressive philosophy of education, especially Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel, and she did value their contribution, but still she was not totally satisfied with them.

“As she became more knowledgeable about these important educational theories, Montessori recognised their value but also found them scientifically inadequate. Through promoting children’s dignity and freedom, she found that Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel had relied on a philosophical, rather than a scientific, view of children.”<sup>15</sup>

Like Steiner, and also like Kant, Rousseau and Hegel much before, Montessori reacted against the reductionism and mechanism of mainstream schooling, with authoritarian and repressive traits at that time — much sharper than today. From this historical point of view, Montessori decisively contributed to the pedagogic innovation of the modern age towards a more humanistic and integral kind of education.

At that time, the most influential progressive philosopher of education in North America was Dewey, and it is interesting to note that Dewey’s heir, Kilpatrick, strongly criticised

Montessori instead of valuing her. We could be surprised at Kilpatrick’s hostility against Montessori by keeping in mind their common progressive reaction against the rigidity and dehumanisation of mainstream schooling. But this common general background should not overlook existing differences amongst these pioneers of progressive education. We might tend to oversimplify things just by thinking that all of them were progressive educationists questioning mainstream schooling. In spite of this, they worked from different perspectives on different paths, and they were not free from their egos like other mortals. Kilpatrick was clearly dominating the educational scene in North America with other progressives when Montessori went there, and maybe it was his typical human nature that did not allow him to fully recognise the value of Montessori’s contribution, which he certainly diminished.

Quite far from Kilpatrick’s pragmatism, the Montessori Method designs a curriculum that stimulates the inner plan of nature and encourages the child’s own natural inner guidance — which is one of the major themes of Philosophical Idealism. For Montessori, the child is God, and first and foremost the teacher must regard the child as a soul.

Apart from the connection with Rousseau and Naturalism, there is a profound relation between Montessori

<sup>15</sup> Gutek G.L., in Montessori M., 2004, p. 11.

and Philosophical Idealism, which can be biographically explained through her interaction with Theosophy and the Theosophical Society, one fundamental aspect of Montessori that has been often ignored by many of her followers — due to their materialistic bias consistent with the prevailing world view.

On the other hand, this ‘esoteric’ dimension of Montessori brings her closer to Steiner and his Waldorf Method — in depth. Both were Theosophists and both had this metaphysical and spiritual, we could say mystical worldview, so different from the predominating ideology in the modern age. From this point of view, both the Montessori and the Waldorf Method are deeply coherent, although we should not deny either, that Montessori and Steiner followed very different paths in spite of this common philosophical background.

It is not so well known that Maria Montessori was a member of the Theosophical Society — like Steiner. Some prejudiced persons have fiercely denied that Montessori was a Theosophist, while the evidence is undeniable in the archives of the Theosophical Society. The same prejudice has brought some people to push Montessori’s acquaintance with Theosophy at the end of her life, while the existing records show a much earlier bond. In conclusion, Montessori had been related to Theosophy when she was much younger than presumed by many,

and she formally became a member — which has been denied by many. In any case, anybody who earnestly examines her life and work must acknowledge that her scientific method is not incompatible with a profound spiritual sensitiveness, which she prudently dealt with in the European cultural context. For Montessori, the teacher is the protector of the child’s soul.

At the end of her life, she could closely collaborate with the Theosophical Society in its world headquarters in Adyar, Chennai. Initially invited by the Society in 1939, she had to stay much longer when the Second World War broke out — she was from Italian origin and India was a British colony, for which she was treated as an ‘enemy’ and was interned there. The Theosophical Society adopted her method for its schools, and Dr Montessori was active in lecturing and training. Her humanistic contribution to pedagogy is deeply coherent with Philosophical Idealism, and hence Theosophy.<sup>16</sup>

From the rich life and extensive work of the founder, the Montessori Method provides a wide range of pedagogic materials that stimulate the child’s interest and his or her self-directed activity. For the youngest children (birth to six), for whom the method was originally designed, these pedagogic materials are organised into five categories:<sup>17</sup>

- Practical life
- Sensorial

<sup>16</sup> Cf Wylie W., 2008, “Montessori and the Theosophical Society”, “Quest”, March–April 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Cf Larrison A.L., Daly A.J., C. VAN VOOREN AND LILLARD A.S. 2013. “Playful Learning and Montessori Education”. *American Journal of Play*. Winter 2013.

- Language
- Maths
- Cultural

## **A MORE DETAILED STUDY OF THE PEDAGOGIC PRACTICE**

### **Montessori, Waldorf and the Socratic Method (the Indian Gurukul)**

Montessori designed her method basically for young children, since the method itself developed from the observation of small kids. Adolescence and secondary school — from 11 onwards is another world. And she was aware of it though she left it quite unexplored — probably it was not her task, she already did a lot.

Montessori schools have institutionalised this small children's ethos — though Montessori herself was open to the adaptation of her method to adolescence. If you browse through the net about Montessori Schools you will massively see small children, not adolescents. This dominance of the small children's ethos in Montessori Schools conveys a very real danger in pedagogic terms, since our whole civilisation already produces a structural infantile treatment of adolescence — which is inseparable from the destruction of initiation cultures, and which is also connected to Michel Foucault's repressive strategies of modernity.

The typical Montessori classroom — as advertised by Montessori schools is suitable for kindergarten and the first years of primary

school — may not be so suitable for the end of primary schooling and certainly not for the higher classes. As we said, puberty and adolescence is another world. Moreover, the real anthropological differences in learning between the two genders should be incorporated — which has not been the case till now though it is empirically obvious that they exist.

Apart from being a space for small kids, the typical Montessori classroom is also a women's domain from which men are visibly absent — which constitutes one of the most dramatic trends of our civilisation, the lack of men in education, directly linked to the world crisis of boys' education, because boys obviously need male teachers as role models.

After Montessori's innovation, most of the schools bringing her name became a world of ladies taking care of small kids. The very image of Montessori schools — see most of videos and photos on the net shows that only; adolescents are absent and male teachers almost not visible. Where are the specific needs of adolescents? Where are the specific needs of boys who need role models of their own gender? That is why there is a world crisis of boys' education that is not tackled yet. Education is much more than women with small kids; there are the older age-groups, there are anthropological differences between boys and girls, and the male gender also must be totally involved in education; everybody with common sense — which has been lost by the

way will agree that the growing boy needs the positive role model of his own gender.

Both Piaget and Steiner understood the profound differences between the age-groups and the features of each. From 8 onwards and especially from 11 onwards, and even more from 14 onwards, the deeper meaning of pedagogic principles, such as experiential/self-learning or child-centred education must be implemented in ways that are different in practice. But the very image of Montessori Schools in the net seems to ignore the older age-groups from puberty on and their specific pedagogic needs. Steiner was aware of it, and the Waldorf Method designed different pedagogic strategies for the different age-groups while paying attention to the higher classes. Other educationists have also taken into account the necessary pedagogy for adolescents; on the other hand, the Indian *Gurukul* — like the Socratic dialogue and method is suitable for adolescents, not for small children. Here the presence of male teachers becomes still more important than in the lower grades, especially for boys; it is anthropologically evident that boys need positive role models of their own gender to grow up in a balanced way.

The educational systems must fully comprehend the significance of the different age groups — which Piaget studied in detail, and Steiner incorporated more clearly than Montessori in his Waldorf Method.

From this point of view we believe that the Montessori Method is more suitable for kindergarten and primary school — especially till 7/8 while the Waldorf Method can bring valuable insights for the older age groups/adolescence — which does not mean that Steiner did not pay attention to the lower grades.

Still, educational systems should value and integrate both Montessori and Steiner in an open spirit, not in dogmatic terms, which means that they should be open to other contributions too. We should not forget that Froebel already anticipated many insights of Montessori. Moreover, we should not ignore the fundamental reflections of the great philosophers of education — from Plato to Rousseau, Kant and Hegel, unknown to most of progressive schools; and we should not forget either the grand tradition of the Indian *Gurukul* and the major educationists of India — that do not exist in the mind of most of Montessori or Waldorf teachers. We do believe that there is something fundamental in the Indian *Gurukul*, in Vivekananda, Tagore, Aurobindo, Krishnamurti or Sathya Sai Baba, that Montessori or Waldorf Schools are overlooking whereas they could learn a lot from it — the same would apply to Plato and the Socratic Method.

Montessori made a crucial contribution to education in the modern age — herself more than her followers; Steiner too. To start with, we should combine both instead of



sticking to one of them only. And both must be complemented by other philosophers of education and other pedagogic traditions in an open spirit, not in dogmatic terms. Only this wider perspective with aperture of mind can solve the problems of education in the world and open new avenues for a better future. This is what the educational systems should try to do in the future.

The ideal synthesis for the future of education could be a combination of the Montessori Method for small children (in an open way) and the Socratic Method (parallel to the Indian *Gurukul*) for adolescence — while integrating other valuable contributions, such as the Waldorf Method, and needless to say, the major philosophers of education of the West together with the great educationists of India, totally ignored by Western cultural imperialism.

When implemented in adolescence, the Montessori Method becomes the Socratic Method, which we can also find in the Indian *Gurukul* — the Upanishadic dialogues are deeply coherent with the Platonic dialogues. The pedagogic principles beneath both Montessori and Socrates — and Steiner are the same: self/experiential learning, child-centred and holistic education, etc., within a metaphysical/spiritual vision. Not by chance Montessori was a Theosophist — like Steiner and Socrates is the model for Western Philosophical Idealism. We should keep in mind that Steiner was a

Platonist — through Goethe. This is the underlying philosophical paradigm for integral education.

We can draw a more detailed model of human growth in parallel to the major pedagogic methods:

- *Kindergarten*: Montessori Method (always in an open not dogmatic way)
- *Primary school*: Montessori and Waldorf Method (with other sources)
- *Middle school*: Waldorf and Socratic Method – the Indian *Gurukul*
- *Higher secondary*: The Socratic Method – the *Gurukul*

Education should integrate all the valuable contributions from both the West and the East while taking into account the developmental process. As Kant said, education is a historical process towards to human emancipation.

Last but not least. Both Montessori and Steiner were Theosophists.

Where is the spiritual dimension of the child/adolescent in most of Montessori Schools and even in some Waldorf Schools? Many Montessori Schools have forgotten adolescents and also male teachers. They have also forgotten the spiritual dimension of the child, which was certainly present in Montessori's vision — she was a Theosophist like Steiner. Her philosophy of education incorporates a metaphysical or mystical dimension: the Child as a Soul.<sup>18</sup>

But many Montessori Schools — and even some Waldorf Schools too share the materialistic bias of modern civilisation and become an integral

<sup>18</sup> Cf Montessori M., 2004, p. 127 and p. 262–264.

part of it — they are the cheerful face of this civilisation, but still they share the same paradigm in depth.

The genius of Montessori — or Steiner has been diluted by their followers, as usual in human history; the human condition has not changed yet.

While working on integral education for 20 years in three continents we have continuously heard the question: How do we do it? Parents and teachers are obsessed by the techniques and it seems, to many, that the key to the Montessori or the Waldorf Method lies in the technique. We have always responded that this state of mind corresponds to the technocratic mirage of our civilisation. The key to the Montessori or the Waldorf Method, the key to integral education, does not lie in the technique but in the intention, in the state of consciousness. What is common to all progressive educationists would be the pedagogic principles; all of them have understood and defended the same pedagogic principles in spite of the different perspectives and paths in their respective lives and careers. If a teacher or a parent understands these pedagogic principles, he or she will do it, and may even recreate new practical ways to implement it. Whereas if you do not understand the pedagogic principle and you just mechanically implement a set of techniques you will reproduce the mainstream system without being aware of it. Krishnamurti made profound reflections on this crucial issue, but few listened to him. People

are usually attracted by techniques while few really tackle the issue of conscience. Montessori was aware of it and warned about it, but her words have been forgotten behind the paraphernalia of techniques and material.

“It is my belief that the thing which we should cultivate in our teachers is more the spirit than the mechanical skill of the scientist; that is, the direction of the preparation should be toward the spirit rather than towards the mechanism, said Krishnamurti.”<sup>19</sup>

### THE MONTESSORI METHOD

From anthropological research, M. Montessori observed children in natural settings, such as home, playground, etc. She concluded that children grow and learn from inside out — which not only Piaget but also Philosophical Idealism would endorse, from Socrates to Vivekananda.

There is a natural development of the child, which the educational process must respect.

Children learn of their own accord, and teachers or parents must nurture this natural process through their loving and prudent guidance.

An excess of external inducements — as in mainstream schooling produces dependence on authority and need of approval.

“The school must permit the free, natural manifestations of the child if in the school scientific pedagogy is to be born.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Montessori M., 2004, p. 73.

<sup>20</sup> Montessori M., 2004, p. 74.

- *Conventional schools:* children are forced to learn and need incentives to learn. If they do not respond they are punished. Punishment and prize are inseparable from forced unnatural effort.
- *Montessori schools assume the opposite:* children do not need to be forced to learn; they are naturally interested in learning.

Still, we must be aware that M. Montessori did not arrange a legal trademark or brand name — whereas R. Steiner did which means that anybody can use Montessori's name quite freely — whereas it is legally not possible under the names of 'Steiner' or 'Waldorf'. This is the reason why there are around 2,000 Waldorf Schools in front of around 20,000 Montessori schools. On the other hand, there can be very different interpretations of the Montessori Method — which may have pros and cons in front of the standardisation of Waldorf Schools through the educational franchise — which again may have pros and cons.

### **The three foundations of the Montessori method:**

- The normalisation of the child's natural development
- To cultivate the autonomy of the growing child as a subject
- To educate the whole child – integral education

According to M. Montessori, the classroom environment must be arranged so that it facilitates interaction and experience through activities — amongst children themselves and between child and teacher.

Children must be able to move around and interact amongst themselves and with the teacher; pedagogic materials must be easily accessible.

The classroom is not run by the teacher unilaterally — as in mainstream schools but experienced by the children under qualified freedom — freedom for the child to learn by himself or herself under the caring guidance of the adult.

Montessori stressed that the classroom environment is as important as the teacher.

"The novelty lies, perhaps, in my idea for the use of this open-air space, which is to be in direct communication with the schoolroom, so that the children may be free to go and come as they like, throughout the day. (...)

The principal modification in the matter of school furnishings is the abolition of desks and benches or stationary chairs."<sup>21</sup>

Many Montessori classrooms look pretty original — a large space where all children move around selecting educational materials under the observation and guidance of teachers. Whereas some Montessori classrooms — especially with older children look more conventional with desks in front of the blackboard — and here the Montessori Method is also implemented in some way.

Mixing age-groups: elder students as mentors to the younger and leaders.

The younger see what the elder are doing and seek for explanations.

<sup>21</sup> Montessori M., 2004, p. 120.

These are naturally given, which is highly educational for the young ones. At the same time, the elder are happy to teach what they know and this is also educational for them.

Teachers should not face the children frontally all the time but move around the classroom to pay an individual attention to students one by one or in small groups.

The teacher must follow the child, instead of the child following the teacher.

The teacher is a guide.

### **Experiential Learning**

The school must teach basic skills, such as reading, writing, arithmetics, etc., but basically through educational activities with a practical dimension that affects life and which is meaningful to children. To learn by doing.

Teachers must give to students constructive and practical tasks to complement mere intellectual learning from outside — given by adults.

“The pedagogical method of observation has for its base the liberty of the child; and liberty is activity.”<sup>22</sup>

- Bio-sciences teaching becomes a naturalistic inquiry, raising questions from experience with the world.
- Physical sciences might be taught through practical application.

For small kids **play-way methods** are more suitable, since playing constitutes the natural way of learning for the young child.

Montessori schools have developed many practical play-way tools and educational toys — which are in fact as old as mankind; two centuries back Froebel already designed educational toys for young children.

### **Self-learning**

Adults must give a chance to the children to learn on their own. Children must be self-motivated and find their own interests.

Teachers must allow students to choose what they want to learn and then guide them. When the child exhibits interest in learning something, he or she must be guided by the teacher in his or her own learning process.

According to Montessori, life is based on choice. So children must learn to make their own decisions. They must choose and decide in their own educational process. Learning through obedience to external commands is contrary to life. Imagination awakens the natural interest of the child. “It is true that some pedagogues, led by Rousseau, have given voice to impracticable principles and vague aspirations for the liberty of the child, but the true concept of liberty is practically unknown to educators.”<sup>23</sup>

“Discipline must come through liberty. (...)”

If discipline is founded upon liberty, the discipline itself must necessarily be active.”<sup>24</sup>

Together with free choice through individual or group projects, children

<sup>22</sup> Montessori M. 2004, p. 124.

<sup>23</sup> Montessori M., 2004, p. 74.

<sup>24</sup> Montessori M., 2004, p. 124.

must be taught self-responsibility through practical tasks while taking care of the educational tools, materials and space.

The pedagogic practice must allow children to see a bigger picture of knowledge and their own process of learning, so that they can take ownership of their education, which fosters the child's natural desire to learn.

This can be facilitated when younger students observe what elders are doing by mixing the age groups.

Mental activities and higher functions are connected to physical movement; it is aberrant to force children — and even more boys to sit down in front of a blackboard for the whole day — as in mainstream schooling. The learning process requires freedom of movement and the natural movement of the child.

We must set the energy of the children free. Freedom of education means freedom for the creative energy, which is the urge of life towards the natural inner development of the individual.

However, there must be some organisation in the school. Freedom does not mean lack of organisation. Freedom requires a structured environment. Organisation is necessary for children to work freely. It is also important that the school/classroom incorporates plants and animals; the contact with Nature is fundamental in education.<sup>25</sup> Children must work in the garden and observe

Nature directly; there can even be plants in the classroom. The contact with animals is also highly educational; it has been proved that many psychological troubles improve through it — see for instance the experiments with equino-therapy.

While giving freedom to the child and allowing self-learning, the teacher must provide material means, guidance and understanding. The teacher's role is indispensable. Hence, teachers should not apply non-interference when children behave in naughty ways; then, they must stop them and make them realise what they are doing so that they positively transform themselves — which is something very different from negative criticism or coercive punishment.

In the Montessori classroom materials are organised into five areas:<sup>26</sup>

- **Practical life:** this kind of material and exercise enhances physical coordination, self care and care of the environment. There are also lessons about polite manners too.
- **Sensorial:** this kind of material is used in activities and exercises for children to experience the natural world and the physical environment, including shapes, colours, etc. Here, Montessori borrowed many ideas from Dr Itard and especially Dr Seguin with their scientific education.

<sup>25</sup> Cf Montessori M., 2004, Chapter 10.

<sup>26</sup> Cf Larrison A.L., Daly A.J., VAN VOOREN C. AND LILLARD A.S., "Playful Learning and Montessori Education", *American Journal of Play*, Winter 2013.



- **Mathematics:** this kind of material shows basic concepts like addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, numeration, value, etc. A famous Romantic pedagogue, Froebel, was probably the first educator to design educational play-way material — known as Froebel's gifts.
- **Language:** this kind of material provides experiences through various exercises to develop the basic skills of reading and writing.
- **Cultural subjects:** this kind of material allows children to learn cultural subjects like geography (map puzzles, globes, etc.), history and science (for instance, naming and organising plants or animals). Music and art are also incorporated in different ways.

These five domains would be complemented by other activities, namely the various artistic disciplines, performance, gardening, activities into Nature, games and sports, etc. For the earlier stages Montessori attached a great importance to sensory training.<sup>27</sup>

Many videos are available in the net showing a diversity of materials from the five areas and how they work. Needless to say, Waldorf Schools utilise similar tools; other educational organisations and some commercial companies have also produced this kind of educational toys, which Froebel already anticipated two centuries back.

The materials must be easily accessible to the children in furniture especially designed for them — not for the adults.

The utilisation of the materials by the children allows self-learning, experiential learning and problem-solving. This pedagogic practice is obviously child-centred, and teachers move around like the children themselves paying individual attention to them one by one or in small groups.

### THE WALDORF METHOD

Unlike M. Montessori who focussed on young children only, R. Steiner draw a whole map of human development through stages and elucidated the pedagogic principles and tools of education at every stage. Year by year the Waldorf system prepares the growing child for the next step through a scaffolding of human growth parallel to pedagogic practice carefully designed by Steiner — something that Montessori, in spite of her valuable contribution, did not do. Through this process, Steiner underlined the interdisciplinary nature of knowledge.

We do appreciate the remarkable contribution of Steiner — like that of Montessori. Both were decisive to break the rigidity of the dehumanised mainstream school system. But sticking to them and their time without free inquiry and innovation is in fact contrary to their spirit and aperture of mind.

<sup>27</sup> Cf Montessori M., 2004, chapter 12, 13 and 14.



All educational systems around the world might get inspired by them — and by other great educationists from both the West and the East but we should not get blocked at them. Decades have passed and the journey continues. They are the beginning, not the end of the path, which means that their innovation must be reinvented and exploration must go on in an open spirit, not in dogmatic terms.

Steiner himself rarely used the term ‘Waldorf Method’; it was institutionalised by his followers, who recreated a closed system out of his philosophy of education that was still open to ongoing inquiry. As usual in history, the followers have made something that the founder did not do. In fact, Steiner did not pretend to be original and extensively quoted his sources of inspiration, especially the Romantics. His followers only have established the ‘uniqueness’ of the Waldorf Method. For Steiner it was not unique and there was no Waldorf Method even; there was philosophy of education which he explored with an open spirit.

In his own words:

“For the true teacher, pedagogy must be something living, something new at each moment. Everything that teachers carry in their souls as memories robs them of their originality.”<sup>28</sup>

### **Steiner’s model of human development through successive age-groups requiring specific pedagogic approaches**

“(…) how important it is that teachers turn their attention in particular toward the drastic changes, or metamorphoses, that occur during a child’s life — for example, the change of teeth and puberty.”<sup>29</sup>

#### • **From birth to age 7 — Early childhood**

During this period physical development is key, and children learn through play. Hence, the pedagogy must prefer play-way methods and practical activities — with both indoor and outdoor games or activities. Sensory training is also very important because learning occurs basically through the senses. Magic is equally crucial since the young child’s worldview is essentially magical. Songs, poems and fairytales should be widely used together with movement games. The educational process should incorporate natural rhythm and cultural calendar, seasonal festivals drawn from different traditions and cultures.

#### • **From 7 to 14 — Later childhood and early adolescence**

Proper academic instruction starts here because the elder child or young adolescent is

<sup>28</sup>Steiner R. 1995. “The Kingdom of Childhood. Introductory Talks on Waldorf Education”, Anthroposophic Press, New York. p. 85.

<sup>29</sup> Steiner R. 1997. op. cit., p. 48.

Cf also Steiner R. 1996. “The Education of the Child. And Early Lectures on Education”, Anthroposophic Press, New York. p. 6.

more intellectually prepared and more aware of the environment and the world. Here imagination and creativity are fundamental, and the elder child or young adolescent needs a legendary horizon that is inspirational and morally educational. Learning is essentially imaginative and artistic. The pedagogy must take special care of emotional education and artistic expression through all the arts. The elementary school curriculum is multi disciplinary arts-based, including visual arts, drama, dance (eurythmy), vocal and instrumental music and crafts. There is little reliance on official textbooks. Instead, the student creates his or her own illustrated summary of coursework in book form.

- **From 14 to 21 — Later adolescence**

In this period the elder adolescent thinks more in depth and develops abstract thinking – which already awakens from 11 on. The Waldorf school must prepare elder students for college or professional life. Here, the emphasis shifts towards intellectual understanding, ethical ideals and social responsibility. In higher secondary education, Waldorf Schools provide specialist teachers for the academic subjects. Though the educational process focusses more on the academic subjects, students continue to practise the various artistic disciplines. Above

all, students are encouraged to develop their own free creative thinking together with moral values and social responsibility.

Steiner's developmental approach is inseparable from a deep understanding of the human being that cannot overlook the spiritual dimension that simply exists. Waldorf education is but the translation into the pedagogic field of this deeper understanding of humanity — Anthroposophy. In Steiner's words:

"A new study of humanity, a new understanding of humanity is necessary. (...)

The second thing that we must develop as we work toward a more humane form of society, is a social attitude of the teachers towards the children already in the school. This is a new love of humanity — an awareness of the interplay of forces between the teacher and pupil."<sup>30</sup>

"I am not surprised that the majority of today's teachers view their work mechanically. Their understanding of humanity comes from the dead science that has arisen out of the industrial, statist and capitalist life of the past three or four centuries. That science has resulted in a dead art of education (...)"<sup>31</sup>

The most important to understand Steiner's philosophy of education is to keep in mind that the Waldorf School derives from Anthroposophy understood as a 'weltanschauung', a worldview that is spiritual and

<sup>30</sup> Steiner R., 1995, p. 59.

<sup>31</sup> Steiner R., 1995, p. 60.

metaphysical, Socratic or Platonist, and also Christian, in front of the materialistic and mechanistic paradigm of the capitalist modern world.

Through this new understanding of humanity that is at the same time very old, Steiner puts forward a developmental approach to education, through which the Waldorf Method would be based upon the following principles.

- We must educate the whole child (Holistic/integral education) — physically, intellectually, emotionally, morally, socially and spiritually.
- Not only should we integrate all the dimensions of humanity in the school; also, the educational process should evolve from the whole to the parts through an interdisciplinary spirit in all subjects or activities.
- Students must be taught how to think — freely rather than what to think.
- Children must learn by themselves at their own pace — self-learning.
- Learning must occur through direct experience and practical activities/projects — experiential learning.
- Teaching must be linked to reality and the practical aspects of life. Steiner opposed the abuse of mere intellectual, abstract bookish knowledge that becomes overwhelming and finally useless in mainstream schooling.
- Teaching can be delivered in ways that are more creative and artistic, using movement, games, even dance, music or the arts; obviously this may be more suitable for the younger students in simple ways, but even in higher grades the same philosophy can be implemented on more mature terms combining different disciplines in an interdisciplinary pedagogy.
- For the lower grades, even maths can be taught in more visual and artistic ways that use geometrical forms for arithmetic — the holistic approach that integrates different aspects of knowledge and reality. For the higher grades, maths can be linked not only to science but also to philosophy and obviously to social issues — again the interdisciplinary spirit that can imbibe everything in the educational process.
- Education must be child-centred: teachers must follow children, not children following teachers — as in mainstream schooling; the teacher is a friend, philosopher and guide.
- Every student must unfold his or her own potential and vocation.
- Through education the individual must find himself; the Socratic heritage.
- Education must be transformative rather than informative. As it has been emphasised in the Indian educational tradition, love

— pedagogic love — lies at the heart of the teaching process in Steiner's vision:

"Now, my dear children, when you have felt your teacher's love all day long up here, then you can go home again and tell your parents about what you have learned, and your parents will be glad (...)"<sup>32</sup>

- In Waldorf schools, students and class teacher stay together and grow together through a whole seven years cycle — which might be questioned.
- There is no hurry for academics — in front of the mainstream pressure in terms of academics. Students may not begin reading until grades 2/3 and even 4 — which again may be questioned; not too early, not too late.

Before learning to read and write, young children become familiar with shapes or forms through drawing and painting that will bring to the alphabet later.

- Steiner favoured a slower more integrated approach very different from conventional academic methods in mainstream schooling. The historical process through which humanity discovered literacy — oral tradition, images, shapes, symbols, alphabet may ease the way for children to learn to read and write. Children will first listen to a fairy tale, then they will review the story

by creating images, later they will explore shapes, forms and symbols, and finally they will progressively learn the letters of the alphabet. Letters may be linked to words or ideas — B for bear — or objects or images — T like a tree. Hence, the growing child will do the experience of the human process itself.<sup>33</sup>

- Subjects are taught for three to four weeks.
- Children are able to learn and explore at their own pace.
- Students are not given standardised tests and marks. Their progress is measured globally through observation. Teacher's observation must be discreet not to produce anxiety in the child. Tests and grades are only introduced in the higher classes as a preparation for college.
- Teachers work with parents to set goals to students.
- In conclusion, Waldorf education wants to unfold human potential in depth with all its capacities, and educate the whole child.
- The school must stimulate both the intellectual or rational and intuitive or artistic side of the student in equal measure — unlike mainstream schooling that hypertrophies the intellect to the detriment of the more intuitive or aesthetic skills. The holistic nature of Waldorf education embraces the spiritual dimension,

<sup>32</sup> Steiner R., 1996, p. 31.

<sup>33</sup> Cf Steiner R., 1997, pp. 64–67.

dramatically lost in the modern world from Steiner's point of view.

In his own words:

"We must develop an art of education that can lead us out of the social chaos into which we have fallen (...) There is no escaping this chaos unless we find a way to bring spirituality into human souls through education."<sup>34</sup>

### **Pedagogic tools of the Waldorf method**

Through the successive stages of human development

"The true curriculum results from an understanding of the stages of human life."<sup>35</sup>

#### **• The first stage (birth/7) – Kindergarten/early childhood<sup>36</sup>**

- Teachers must create a warm, beautiful and loving environment, which is as important as the pedagogic method itself. The physical setting must be pastel in colour to create a calming effect.
- Furniture should be simple and made of solid wood.
- The educational toys should also be made of wood and natural materials.
- The classroom must be like a home.
- Routines must be regularly set and followed (daily, weekly, seasonally and yearly routines).

- At this stage Steiner emphasises domestic or daily real-life tasks, playing and artistic activities that children can engage in.
- It is important to adapt the activities according to the calendar, the natural rhythm of Nature and the cultural or spiritual festivals of the year. Fairy tales, fables, poems and folklore are cherished by Steiner for this age-group; they should be told aloud by teachers — as it would be customary in the olden days. Learning must basically happen through a hands-on student-led approach.
- For this age-group, sensory training, imitation, play-way methods and educational toys must prevail; Steiner always preferred to use natural materials and objects from Nature, which children themselves can collect.
- Waldorf schools — like Montessori — utilise a wide range of educational games and toys, since playing is the natural way for children to learn. Waldorf schools combine movement, speaking and singing in circle group as a creative or artistic way of teaching more suitably for the nature of the young child. Free-playing is also important; we must avoid excess of adult interference characteristic of

<sup>34</sup> Steiner R., 1997, p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> Steiner R., 1995, p. 42.

<sup>36</sup> Cf Steiner R., 1997, lecture three.

modern societies that becomes over-protective. Sensory training is equally fundamental at this stage, developing coordination and evoking the sense of a deeper harmony.

- Movement is crucial for human growth; that is why Steiner encouraged dance — not only for girls but also boys, not only for young children but also adolescents. With professional assistance, Steiner developed ‘eurythmy’ — the good rhythm that incorporates all the senses, movement, gesture, music, arising the natural movement of the child, balance and a deeper harmony.
- First and foremost, the adult must awaken the sense of wonder in the young child; this will be the basis for an eagerness to learn through academics in higher grades. Teachers and parents must also foster the child’s natural power of imagination, which can be refined by story-telling, poetry, the arts, etc. Hence, fantasy playing is very educational for small kids.
- Teachers must develop problem-solving in peer relationships while nurturing the sense of brotherhood, community and unity. Children must be encouraged to work in groups.
- Mixing age groups is highly educational: the younger students look up to the older and the older have a responsibility towards the younger.
- Activities in natural settings must be organised regularly while awakening the feeling of beauty and awe. The direct contact with Nature is deeply educational too. Gardening should constitute a normal routine in the school.
- **The second stage (7/14): Primary and middle school**<sup>37</sup>
  - Language must be based on world literature and myths; Steiner stressed both the intercultural and mythical dimensions of language and culture. Legends are as important as history.
  - Children must get to know about the world’s main civilisations, religions and cultural contributions — in a horizon that is mythical, far from the materialistic world view that has alienated humanity and impoverished culture. Here we must remember — and celebrate Steiner’s roots in Theosophy and Philosophical Idealism and his metaphysical ‘weltanschauung’ contrary to the prevailing materialism of the modern age.
  - Science teaching must cover all the areas: geography, biology, chemistry, physics, geology, astronomy, always in ways adequate to the age. In science subjects students must observe and describe scientific concepts in their own words

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<sup>37</sup> Cf Steiner R., 1997, lecture fourth and fifth.



and drawings; experimental activities and practical tasks can be basic tools for science teaching — instead of mere bookish intellectual learning.

- Mathematics must also cover all its branches: arithmetic, algebra and geometry.
- Physical education and gardening become an integral part of education, not mere extra-curricular activities.
- Steiner especially emphasised the educational value of the arts in all the various artistic disciplines and also the different crafts.
- Following Plato, he stressed the importance of dance — not only for girls but also for boys, not only for small kids but also for teenagers; with the assistance of professional advice, he developed eurythmy.

Community life with relationship and respect for others should also be an integral part of education. Though prudent in a deeply materialistic culture, Steiner dared to introduce the metaphysical aspects of reality and knowledge, more easily acceptable through great figures, such as Plato, Dante or Goethe — for instance. This metaphysical or spiritual dimension introduced through culture can unfold intellectual or academic teaching like geometry, history or science.

- Steiner tried to work out the interdisciplinary nature of knowledge parallel to the

holistic nature of reality, not only through bridges amongst the academic disciplines, science and humanities, but even by linking academics and the arts.

- For instance, a group of students will perform some dance — eurythmy that will evoke the dawn of agriculture or the first civilisations. Through this practical activity — self-experiential learning the educational process will integrate: history, culture, music, dance, performance, etc., and sometimes literature, even philosophy or science. The children can make the tools for the performance themselves, hence integrating crafts. This holistic experience constitutes the very essence of integral education. Not only must the school incorporate all the facets of education; moreover, these different facets must be integrated within the educational experience itself for self/experiential learning.
- There must be freedom in the classroom, which means freedom of thought — in front of the unilateral and therefore authoritarian discourse of the teacher in mainstream schooling.
- Learning must be basically experiential and self-directed, which means that the learning process may include teachers'

lessons but also practical activities that allow students to experience by themselves.

- Imagination and creativity, emphasised by Steiner, must always be stimulated through the educational process — in front of the mechanical routine imposed by mainstream schooling.
- Each pupil has his or her main lesson book where they write all what they learn in their own words with their own drawings. Students must find joy in learning. They must enjoy what they do and what they learn.
- Teachers must love what they teach and care deeply of their students. Steiner kept alive the old tradition of the teacher as a friend, philosopher and guide. He was closer than Montessori to the Socratic spirit.

“The teacher respected by the child as an authority should personify what is good, true and beautiful.”<sup>38</sup> The Socratic teacher advocated by Steiner becomes a living example of the values he or she teaches, which has been strongly emphasised by integral value education in India. Amazingly enough, Steiner quotes the trinity of values — good, true and beautiful that lies at the core of the spiritual tradition of India — ‘*satyam*’ (true), ‘*shivam*’ (good), ‘*sundaram*’ (beautiful). In fact the

same trinity of values could be found in Ancient Greece.

As an heir of Socrates, Steiner was convinced that the true teacher must bring the student to question not in negative or nihilistic terms but in positive or constructive ways, to know himself and hence the world and others. Then belief can only come through experience. The Waldorf School cannot teach any catechism or dogma; it must accompany the growing child to question and inquire, to experience and know through his or her own experience.

For Steiner — heir of Philosophical Idealism and hence heir of Socrates and Plato through Goethe education must be essentially transformative — something that constitutes the very basis of integral education for the great educationists and sages of India that Steiner unfortunately did not know very well. As usual in Philosophical Idealism, the inner life as understood by Steiner unfolds the communitarian dimension, the ‘*polis*’. Education must internally transform the growing child, and this inner transformation is inseparable from social service and community concern, brotherhood and unity.

- **Through the third stage (14/21) in higher secondary school**
- Learning will be more individual, intellectual and scholarly; still it must be creative, utilising, for instance, research projects and thesis.

<sup>38</sup> Steiner R., 1997, p. 71.

- Free creative critical thinking should be encouraged.
- Student must find their own worldview and voice.

### SUMMARY

Waldorf kindergarten classrooms look very much like Montessori's kindergarten, since both Montessori and Waldorf are very close to each other in depth. However, Waldorf classrooms in higher grades may look more conventional quite often, with desks in front of the blackboard as in mainstream schools. This is probably inevitable to some extent, since the higher grades require an academic function from the side of the teacher that cannot be implemented in the progressive kindergarten scenario. Still, Waldorf Schools — like other schools of integral education try to implement the pedagogic principles of self or experiential learning and child-centred education even in the higher grades with classrooms that apparently look more conventional. There are ways to do it, and this is what Waldorf and other schools explore. That the Waldorf school is the expression of Anthroposophy was always clear in Steiner's views and statements, even if he was certainly aware of the materialistic bias of mainstream schooling and civilisation. "The anthroposophical movement is the basis of the Waldorf School movement."<sup>39</sup> It is some Waldorf educators or parents after

him that have sometimes tried to establish some sort of difference between both — Anthroposophy and Waldorf school or to ignore Anthroposophy and present the Waldorf method independently from Anthroposophy, maybe to avoid problems or issues arising from social prejudice and hostility.

Another matter would be the respect for the freedom of thought of both the student and the teacher, that Steiner always respected. From this point of view, the founder made it clear that although Anthroposophy is the basis of the Waldorf School and its world view, this does not mean that Anthroposophy is inculcated to the children in some authoritarian way, because Steiner, as a true heir of Socratic, was deeply convinced of the fundamental value of freedom of thought, which means that the Waldorf School should never inculcate Anthroposophy because what Anthroposophy should teach would be precisely freedom of thought. By the way, this would be one of the three pillars of the Theosophical Society too, which was deeply Socratic just like Steiner — the most famous Theosophist with Krishnamurti and Montessori.

In Steiner's words:

"At the Waldorf School in Stuttgart we have been able to pursue an art of education based on anthroposophy for many years; and we have always made it clear to the rest of the world

<sup>39</sup> Steiner R., 1996, p. 162.

that anthroposophy as such was never taught here.”<sup>40</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The article has tried to outline the main points of the pedagogic innovation put forward by Steiner and Montessori in Europe, parallel to that of Dewey and Kilpatrick in North America or the sages of India.

Moreover, it is shown that both Steiner and Montessori share a common cultural background, which is not typically modern utilitarian and technocratic but rather humanistic, even spiritual, metaphysical and Idealistic. The foundation of their pedagogic innovation in Philosophical Idealism must be properly grasped and taken into consideration, like their association with the Theosophical Society. Otherwise, it will not be possible to adequately comprehend their educational message, or evaluate their historical significance. It is this foundation and association that makes them so deeply akin to the sages of India. And it is this kind of idealistic sensitiveness which makes all of them critical with the mainstream school system valueless, soulless and alienating and dissatisfied with ordinary schools and their inherent utilitarianism and technocracy, which reduces the multidimensional nature of humanity and reality to mere academic training from a highly rationalistic stand point.

On the other hand, some scholars or professionals of education have overemphasised their social influence or success. Certainly, a number of schools have developed all around the globe following their inspiration, and no doubt, the school system has changed to some extent in Western countries, especially for the primary section — more in North America than in Europe. Nonetheless, it must be realised that Western or modern mainstream schooling — also in Asia still faces a long process of transformation ahead; it is still technocratic and utilitarian, and it still operates a profound reductionism of the deeper multidimensional nature of humanity and the cosmos. It is still far from the holistic, multidimensional, humanistic, ethical and even spiritual vision of these great educators.

European schooling is probably more rigid and more reluctant to a holistic pedagogy than North American schools. In fact, European universities seem to be pretty rigid compared to the flexibility and dynamism of North American universities. Only Northern European countries, such as The Netherlands, Scandinavia and Finland have shown more sensitiveness towards this holistic value-based aperture. Some aperture was found in the a few social or cultural sectors of Germany. However, a major part of Europe has followed the extreme utilitarianism of the United Kingdom and the extreme rationalism of France. And the whole

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<sup>40</sup> Steiner R., 1997, p. 30.

of Europe is deeply influenced by an intellectual worldview that has obviously promoted merely bookish knowledge instead of experiential learning. That is why Steiner and Montessori ardently defended a more experiential form of education — as it was in the Indian tradition by the way. They both still stand as a symbol of a long path of transformation ahead. Dewey and his heir, Kilpatrick opened this horizon in North America.

Outside the Western world, the scenario can even be more dramatic. Let us take the example of India, where Dr Montessori was invited to share her pedagogic innovation. She stayed in Adyar with the Theosophical Society for quite a long period of time, giving lectures and training teachers to instil her humanistic and spiritual approach to children into the Indian educational system. After half a century, it can be concluded that the Indian educational system massively ignores Montessori's contribution; not only is beating children common in most of the schools, it is more significant, there is nothing from Montessori's humanistic concern for children. Indian children are massively forced to memorise even without proper understanding in order to pour down an undigested mass of information into mechanical tests devoid of any creativity. The mainstream schooling of India constitutes the paroxysm of the typically modern utilitarian soulless education invented in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe.

Fortunately, there are new trends coming out today that strive for a more humanistic, value-based, spiritual and holistic kind of education.

Even in the cradle of modernity, Europe, more and more parents dislike the mainstream school system and feel that it lacks the humanistic touch of Montessori, the spiritual and holistic sensitiveness of Steiner, or the progressive and deeply ethical vision of Dewey or Kilpatrick. An increasing number of parents search for alternative schools and do not find enough of them — especially in Southern Europe.

Therefore, it can be concluded that, in spite of some evolution through the twentieth century, mainstream schooling is still essentially technocratic, utilitarian and valueless; it still reduces the deeper multidimensional nature of the human being to poorer merely academic patterns, because the world view or paradigm in general terms has not changed yet. Education is always a mirror of the whole civilisation. If you go to another country or continent, or another solar system or galaxy, and you want to know about their civilisation and world view, first and foremost examine their educational system, and you will get to know everything about them, their culture and their state of consciousness.

Then, the educational message of great educationists, such as Steiner or Montessori in Europe, Dewey or Kilpatrick in North America, together with the sages of India, can still be a

source of inspiration for a long process of transformation of the educational systems towards a more holistic, ethical, spiritual and humanistic vision, knowing with Kant that ethics and humanism cannot be separated, and also knowing with R. Panikkar that humanism and spirituality cannot be dissociated either.

R. Panikkar warned that technocracy and humanism are mutually exclusive, and in terms of civilisation we must make a decision for one or the other. The modern world has made a clear decision — for technocracy, and nothing has changed yet in general terms; in fact it has even worsened, just see the abuse of technology in daily life and amongst children in particular, or just see the increasing consumerism everywhere, also in Asia. The school or college system is a reflection of this technocratic world view. R. Panikkar defended another choice — for humanism; like Steiner and Montessori, like the sages of India.<sup>41</sup>

In spite of the normal caution in this kind of mainstream report, the researchers of the University of West England conclude:

“There are a number of aspects of Steiner’s school practice that might readily inform good practice in maintained schools, whilst others may be more controversial but could be the basis for profitable dialogue.”<sup>42</sup>

The controversial aspects could only arise from the difference of paradigm or world view between Steiner and mainstream schooling as indicated in the introduction of this article. The controversy, if arising, may be properly channelled, knowing that within the paradigm of Philosophical Idealism wisdom is an invitation; unlike the common ego and ordinary ideologies, wisdom never imposes itself. As the renowned philosopher R. Panikkar stated, you can take it or not, this is your freedom. It is an invitation; it only suggests.

<sup>41</sup> Cf Panikkar. 1999. *Cultural Disarmament. The Way to Peace*. John Knox Press, Louisville (Kentucky)  
—, “The Dialogical Dialogue”, in F. Whaling, coord., “The World’s Religious Traditions”, T. and T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1984.

<sup>42</sup> Ph. Woods, M. ASHLEY, G. WOODS. 2005, p. 8.