

## Nurturing Human Growth - a Research Strategy for Waldorf Education

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This article is the result of a two-year process that has accompanied the establishment of the Nordic Master Degree Programme in Waldorf Education (2004-2006). Its content grew out of dialogues within the Study Counsel of the Masters Degree Programme and dialogues with the Association of Waldorf schools and the Pedagogical Section of the School of Spiritual Science in Norway. It has since 2006 been used as a framework for a National curriculum project.

Development of Waldorf Education is not conceivable without developing *a culture of research* in touch with the core of Steiner's pedagogical impulse. What does this mean? It means we need a research strategy for Waldorf Education. And it means that this strategy must be meaningful to the public, the Waldorf teachers, the Waldorf schools and school movement, the Waldorf teacher training institutions and the Pedagogical Section.

### Why: the purpose of a research strategy

Ultimately, we need *public research* in order to communicate and dialogue Steiner education in a world where education – lifelong and flexible – has a growing focus of attention for both governments and business corporations. Such a dialogue is a question of survival of Steiner's impulse for a genuinely human and humane education.

The more immediate aim is to develop *a culture of research and inquiry* amongst teachers and Waldorf schools. There is a strong oral culture of educational practice based dialogue to build on. It needs, however, to be voiced and embedded a continuous written culture of enquiry.

The aim Master Degree Programme is to develop the *students independent research capacity* in the context of the two cultures of research mentioned above. In addition, a research activity among the staff members related to the programme activity is crucial.

### What: the profile of a research strategy

Referring to Wittgenstein's critique of how academic institutions tend to create a conceptual world which loses contact with lived experience in the field of activity it is meant to serve, the scientific committee<sup>1</sup> pointed at the inherent danger that the Master Degree Programme in its approach to research and education loses contact with the culture of education (embedded in the Steiner schools) it is meant to serve. Put in simple words: There is a large danger, when establishing academic activity in Waldorf Education, to create a conceptual closed world and loose contact with "ground" (the life world of the schools) and with "heaven" (the educational impulse of Steiner). It is a danger of becoming blunt, of shaping an academic profile from what is expected and commonplace.

Taking Steiner's (1886) epistemology as a point of departure, four methodological qualities may shape the identity of a research strategy:

#### 1. *An extended concept of action*

A first characteristic of our research profile would be a widened concept of Action Research. In contemporary educational research, Action Research is not so much a method as a general approach to research. The basic idea is to involve practitioners by offering cooperation between them and a team of researchers. Practitioners pose questions from their experience, which are often of a

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1. Quoted from the Scientific Evaluation Committee in their evaluation report on the Study Plans for the Master Degree Programme (NOKUT 2003).

practical nature: how can we achieve this, solve this etc. The researchers then more or less transform these questions into questions for research; that is, what do we need to *know* in order to be able to achieve this or solve that. The next step is to choose the appropriate research methods, which could be anything from statistical tests to qualitative, in-depth interviews.

Our widened concept of Action Research would include this, but would further include an ever closer link between researchers and practitioners, because they would be one and the same person. The first step in this widening would be to see the relevance for research of Schön's (1989) notions of *reflection-on-action* and *reflection-in-action*.

A second step is to extend the concept of action and see that a human deed or practice is not necessarily outer action, a bodily doing or saying something, but may include "*inner attentive action*" connected to soul and mind. This realisation establishes a link to Steiner's *Philosophy of spiritual activity* as he presents it in *Philosophy of Freedom* (Steiner 1894). The extension of the concept of practice to also include the act of moving attention embedded in all activity of sensing and thinking shows how the core of scientific activity itself is spiritual. The realm of practice connected to our spiritual life is thereby opened to be included in the ontology of science<sup>2</sup>. As a stance, it relates clearly to Torbert & Taylor's (2008) concept of action inquiry.

## 2. An extended concept of observation

Building on the tradition of phenomenology, current pedagogical research (Østergaard 2003) extends the concept of observation in educational research to also include qualitative methods (Silverman 2000) and individualized research design. Research connected to creative arts and therapy take this approach one step further and introduce the concept of "art-based research" (McNiff 1995). A research strategy dedicated to develop Waldorf education must focus on the fruitful complementarity between the science and the art of education. The intimate relations between art and science presented in Steiner's theory of knowledge (Steiner 1886) links up to the general reappraisal of Goethe's scientific method, which can be found in modern theory of knowledge (Amrine et al. 1996, Barnes 2000). Building on the tradition of Michael Faraday (Faraday 1860) in the natural science education, there is already a wide range of publications developing a phenomenological approach to science education in physics (Julius 1990, Mackensen 1995), chemistry (Julius 1980, Ott 1975) and biology (Schad 1987, Kranich 2002) Waldorf Schools. As indicated by Østergaard (2003) it is useful in educational action research to extend the phenomenological approach from observation of natural phenomena to also include qualitative observation of the learner (pupil) and of all activities in the act of teaching. Brierley (2000) takes this one step further his didactics of geography in Waldorf Schools where soul development and soul observation of the child plays a central role, and is linked to the learning process in the subject. The extended concept of observation implies an emphasis on the schooling of the senses of the educational practitioner and researcher, thereby bridging the spheres of soul and science and pointing to an extended concept of schooling.

## 3. An extended concept of schooling

Educational theory connected to vocational training and to education in the arts and crafts generally focuses on the schooling or training elements of mastery (Schön, 1989). Building on this perspective on schooling and mastery, our research strategy for Waldorf Steiner education extends this concept to focus on interplay between a schooling of thinking, feeling and will. An epistemological basis for such a activity-sensitized ecology of knowing is worked out by Hugo (1995). It builds a bridge between traditional concepts of schooling in education within the sports, arts and crafts and the many exercises directed towards schooling of the soul of the teacher or educational researcher developed by Steiner in connection with the Waldorf school.

## 4. An extended concept of communication

Our research strategy in Waldorf Education will relate to all aspects of current communication theory, with a special focus on methods in qualitative research interview (Kvale 2000). It will at same time be open to the extension of the concept of communication to encompass encounters between beings in a world of uttering beings. The existentialists within educational theory, like Bollnow (1976) and Buber (1983), would always emphasize the being-too-being sphere of education and learning. For them, the central phenomena in education was the "meeting of beings" and qualities related to this meeting. Where there is no meeting between human beings there is no real communication, and no real human growth. In Finland, professor in educational science, Simo Skinnari (2002), recently developed a phenomenology of education where the concept of "pedagogical love" is central. When something like this happens, it is a sensation and revelation because the concept of love has no space and place in current, conventional educational theory. In America we see similar things happening: Building on the therapeutic traditions of Jung and Hillman, Sardello (1995) develops the concept to include a phenomenology of the soul in it's meeting with nature and

2. A third step is, on this basis, to extend Schön's methodological concept of reflection-in-action to analyse the structure of this pure attentive activity by self-observation (Witzenmann 1983).

future. Similarly, in his lecture on “Love and knowledge”, given at the Columbia University in February 2005, Arthur Zajonc shows how a university course can build a bridge between the two worlds of knowledge and love. As in a classroom, so in life; we are beings among beings.

Keeping in mind that (1) *spirit* is at work in the key activity of science (moving attention) in sensing and thinking, that (2) *soul* is accompanying this activity and that (3) we thereby build our *incarnated organs* of perception, we see how life is nurturing the processes of knowing. The extended concept of communication adds to this image of outer life in magic touch with inner life, by showing us the opposite gesture: the inner life of the researcher – his moods and movements of soul and spiritual attention – is in touch with outer life. In the classroom we all know the reality of this in-between of beings in attentive touch. In educational action research it needs to be acknowledged, and taken into the arena of conscious, creative inquiry. It is the link from the arena of educational research to the arena of schooling personal and professional “virtues” (Sardello 2000) – because when dealing with soul ...

...we are dealing then with the distinctly human realm, where the creating factor is absolutely unavoidable. That is to say, investigation of soul is also soulmaking. (Sardello 1995)

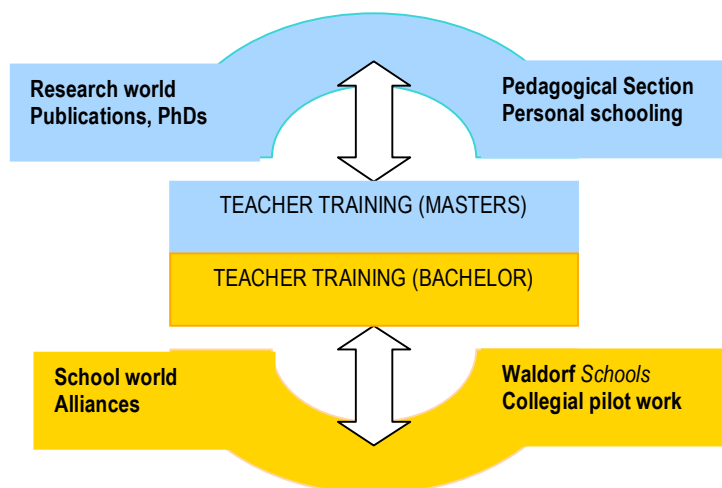
An extended concept of communication is a bridge to Steiner’s epistemology and his spiritual science. It is by this gateway we bring the self-understanding of science in touch with moral life. The business of knowing (epistemology) is no longer separate from the business of being.

A teacher that enters the classroom would not isolate his being from what children are taught. On the contrary, it is inside the developed field of relations that learning will take place. In his “poetics of contemplative methodology in the Waldorf School”, Brierley (2008) demonstrates what this may mean in a classroom context for an experienced, sensitized action researcher.

## How - a research strategy for Waldorf Education

A research strategy should encompass the researchers, educators and practitioners of Waldorf Education. They represent an ecology of modes of knowing that mutually support each other. The schools can only develop when the research attitude embedded in Steiner’s educational impulse foster cultures of inquiry in pedagogical, didactical and social questions related teaching and school development. And teacher training needs to nurture a research attitude in the development of the teachers.

The figure below illustrates how the whole ecology of “ways of knowing in education” can be reflected in an ecology of participating organs in a common research strategy. In an organism, the different ways of knowing must be differentiated and unified. They depend on each other.



Teacher training has a key position here in linking these worlds of educational research and practice, with bachelor level more strongly reaching down into the school world and master level more strongly reaching up into the research world. The figure illustrates how the double bridge, *practical and spiritual*, between anthroposophy and the world can be built by a joint culture of practical soulful education and soulful educational research. It also matches the new policies in educational research, where it is demanded tighter relations and interplay from the world of educational research the world of everyday school life.

*Shared ownership to shared tasks*

The challenge in our time is that we learn to cultivate our own questions. Individually, they can bring together what tends to fall apart in academic life, namely our personal, professional and scientific quest. Fruitfulness in research is linked to intensity and long-term commitment in the way we live with the questions. When we see this in our own biographies, we can also learn to see the “holding together effect” of shared questions in forming cultures of inquiry. The key factor is shared ownership to shared tasks. A community of innovative practice has a task it is giving itself, linked to questions. The intensity and ecology of the shared questions build the “carrying capacity” and growth structure of the research culture.

Built on this framework, a national curriculum project has been developed in Norway, which involves all 37 schools, Rudolf Steiner University College and the Nordic Research Network (norensenet). It resulted in an action research based curriculum document that was handed in to the government during autumn 2008. Currently this curriculum document is taken another step, into a test-out and revision phase (2009-2010). A research culture is thereby emerging.

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