

L1) Teacher Self-Development: the foundation conditions for the cultivation of Cognitive and Moral Abilities.

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Introduction

This module concentrates on Teacher Self-Development, meaning the development and enhancement of teacher cognitive and moral abilities. This means the teacher abilities in thinking, feeling, willing, imagination and perception, etc, in Steiner Education contexts. **In modules 1 & 2 we referred to this as the seventh type of research in Steiner Education, namely: Self-Transformation.** As we have seen from previous modules, in the context of Steiner / Waldorf Education, the development of the child is interlaced with the state and development of the teachers, parents and carers. It would be fair to say that the education of the child in Steiner settings is significantly dependent on the self-development of the adults in their lived environment.

Terminology

In the following, the terms “teacher” or “educator” are used, and these are intended to include all teachers, parents and carers. That is all who are in charge of children and all learners generally. In some of the Steiner texts and quotes, the reader will find some expressions that are of an unusual character, especially in the context of education and education research. Such terms as “esoteric”, “occult student”, “spiritual”, “astral bodies”, “chakras”, etc, appear frequently, some of these have been explained in context, but, in terms of the first three of these, a word here might be helpful. In his later writings and lectures, Steiner replaced these terms with expressions like “spiritual”, “spiritual researcher”, “spiritual science”.

This change in terminology has been continued here, in order to re-affirm Steiner's wish to move the enterprise away from mystical sounding language towards one in which the terminology expresses a genuine striving towards a **scientific approach** to researching the **soul and the spirit**. So the reader will find some changes in the texts presented here in keeping with this approach (i.e. compared to the pdf files included in the reading). This change is done especially bearing in mind more current research by modern education scholars which appears in journals such as *The International Journal of Children's Spirituality*. The term "spiritual" and "spiritual research" are no longer considered unusual in academic terms, especially with the associated re-conceptualisation of the idea of the "spiritual" as also including the cognitive and the moral (see article by Ron Best attached):

"It is further argued that to require some empirical evidence in the form of personal experience before the words 'spiritual' and 'spiritual education' can be meaningful is fundamentally misguided. In conclusion, it is suggested that a willingness to embrace the spiritual as concept, experience and awareness is essential to the education of the child as a whole person." Best, R (2008): In defence of the concept of 'spiritual education': a reply to Roger Marples, *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, Vol. 13, No. 4, November 2008, 321–329 p. 321.

Bearing this new trend in mind as well as the role of Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education (SMSC) in modern mainstream education, we will consider this and the like in the context of teacher / educator self-development in Steiner Education.

In the following slide, elements of which we have seen previously, there are a number of cognitive and moral capacities required of a teacher to be a good example (child development Phase 1) or a good natural authority (child development Phase 2) or good guide (child development Phase 3). The following slide gives an overview of the moral and cognitive abilities aspired to by educators in Steiner Educational settings as has been indicated in module 3. As can be seen, there is a confluence of the **Learning Principles** of the students, as discussed in module 3, with the **Cognitive and Moral Abilities** of the teacher which is to be considered in this module. It follows that, if the learner is to develop the indicated abilities, then, in the context of Steiner's Philosophy of Education, teachers will need to have developed these abilities in themselves. Hence Self-Development of the teacher becomes a primary directive of Steiner/Waldorf Education.

Put differently:

The question of the Learning Principles of the Student has been transformed into the question of the Cognitive and Moral Abilities of the Teacher / Educator.

Take some considerable time in considering the following table in respect of the cognitive and moral implications of each of the ideas in each column. The table shows teacher attributes extracted from the child development tables in module 3:

Teacher Cognitive & Moral Abilities and Pedagogical Relationships

Child Development Phase 1 (0-7 yrs)

Pedagogical / Learning Principles as the aspired to Cognitive & Moral Abilities of the Teacher:

As in all the below, being a good moral example in thought, feeling and action and in the creation of imaginative learning and play environments.

Be good examples of walking, arm movements, agile fingers and speaking. Developing the capacity to create environments of love and warmth by example.

Being good examples of coherent and truthful thinking within speaking; of clear and gentle speech; and memory and imagination. Having the ability to create an environment for the child's free exercise of memory and imagination.

Child Development Phase 2 (7-14 yrs)

Pedagogical / Learning Principles as the aspired to Cognitive & Moral Abilities of the Teacher:

Cultivate imagination / fantasy in themselves.

Cultivate the ability to represent facts in a living way .

Be able to be a representative of the good, the true and the beautiful.

Be able to develop inner warmth, sincerity, and truthfulness.

Cultivate the ability to represent causes and effects through imagination.

Child Development Phase 3 (14-21 yrs)

Pedagogical / Learning Principles as the aspired to Cognitive & Moral Abilities of the Teacher:

Respecting the freedom / independence of the Learner.

Develop the ability to present ideals of truth , beauty and goodness in the teaching matter as well as in themselves.

Cultivate the power of reason and the ability to present teaching matter using reason and evidence.

Develop awareness of "Humanity as a Whole".

As an exercise, chose one or two elements from the table and write some notes to yourself about it. For example, have a think and write some notes about what it might mean to be “a good moral example in thought, feeling and action and in the creation of imaginative learning and play environments”? You may like to chose something from the area where you think you might end up working, i.e. Kindergarten, lower school or upper school. Try any or all if you wish.

As we will see in later modules, these teacher cognitive and moral abilities have a twofold influence:

Firstly, they are of value for the children in terms of the acquisition of cognitive and moral abilities for themselves.

Secondly, they are a means through which children can learn all curricula subjects no matter what they are.

These capacities have their root in, and are suffused by, some **foundational** abilities that can be developed by educators as outlined in Steiner's writings, such as the six and eight virtues, self-reflection and the cultivation of individual moral insight. The aim of this module is to introduce these as well as to indicate their connection to Steiner's Educational Philosophy.

Self-Knowledge and the Educator

Steiner saw Self-Knowledge as the starting point for the Self-Development of teachers: without knowing your nature you cannot consciously change it:

“The first essential for a teacher is **self-knowledge**... Teachers must always keep themselves in hand, and above all must never fall into the faults that they are blaming the children for.” Steiner, R (1924): Kingdom of Childhood, Anthroposophic Press, p. 54.

As we will see, this is an integral part of his general notion that teachers take a lead role in the development of children:

“Here you can see how much of what people call the question of education is actually a question about the **qualities of the teacher**.” Steiner, R (1924): The Renewal of Education, Anthroposophic Press, p. 125.

“What kind of school plan you make is neither here nor there; what matters is **what sort of a person you are**”. Steiner, R (1924): Kingdom of Childhood, Anthroposophic Press, p. 19. [My bold]

As we have seen in module 3, this self-development has a number of different components and which are at their greatest importance in the early years, but still valid throughout the school years:

“This imposes a **moral duty on adults to be worthy of such imitation**, which is far less comfortable than exerting one’s will on children. **Children take in all that we do, such as the ways we act and move. They are equally susceptible to our feelings and thoughts...** Therefore, education during these first two and a half years should be confined to the **self - education of the adults in charge**, who should think, feel, and act in a way that, when perceived by children, will cause them no harm.” Steiner, R (1922/2003): Soul Economy, Anthroposophic Press, p. 110. (My emphasis).

As we will further see, Self-Knowledge, leading to Self-Development has the following elements:

The Self-Knowledge of

Leading to the

The Self-Development of



Thinking

Feeling

Willing

Imagination

Memory

Perception

For Steiner, the first condition for being a good teacher is self-knowledge leading to self-development of thinking, feeling and willing. As we will see later on, this will also include developing the ability to observe the World clearly as well as develop a lively imagination. Self-Knowledge is a precursor to these.

On the Relationship between the Cognitive and the Moral

In the scope of Steiner's writings, a frequently occurring theme is the connection between the development of cognitive and moral capacities. In fact it would be fair to say that Steiner often emphasised the latter over the former and in many cases referred to a moral virtue as an accompaniment to the cultivation of a cognitive ability:

“Thus, if we seek to penetrate the mysteries of human nature through our own efforts, we must abide by the **golden rule** of the spiritual sciences. This rule states: “For every **single** step that you take in seeking knowledge of hidden truths, you must take **three** steps in perfecting your character toward the good.” Whoever follows this rule can do the following exercises”. Steiner, R (1904): Knowledge of the Higher Worlds, Anthroposophic Press p. 62. [My emphasis]

As we will see throughout this module, this moral golden rule, in various guises, can frequently be observed.

Devotion to Truth and Knowledge

In his book, “Knowledge of the Higher Worlds”, Rudolf Steiner introduces the whole question of self-development in terms of some essential preconditions or primary virtues. The first and foremost of the “virtues” that Steiner writes of is: “Devotion to Knowledge and Truth”. The book is included in the Reading File for this module.

These conditions are the cornerstone of his views on this as well as providing the basis for the above mentioned cognitive and moral attributes striven for by teachers in a Steiner / Waldorf School.

Please read chapter 1 from the above book now (In Reading file).

From your reading of this chapter, you may have noticed that Steiner discusses various facets of devotion, or reverence. Firstly, Steiner makes it clear that this is not a question of blind adoration of other persons or even submission to them. This devotion and reverence is to **truth** and **knowledge**.

In the context of being a teacher in a Steiner School, this is of critical significance. As we have seen in previous modules, the task of a Steiner / Waldorf teacher is to find creative ways of adapting the content of what is taught to the changing nature of the developing child. In the first instance this means having knowledge of the children you are teaching as well as of the subject content. The prerequisite for this is a commitment or **devotion** to acquiring that **knowledge** or the **truth** of the children and the subjects taught. This may be a process of greater or lesser extent depending on the existing knowledge of the educator. This point is to identify a striving towards the knowledge of developing children and of the World as presented in the teaching content (curriculum).

As can be seen from the text, Steiner's ideas about devotion to knowledge and truth goes beyond standard definitions of the latter. For him, this is not a mere formal affair, but something that is a part of real life and extends to many things as he says: "Each moment that we spend becoming aware of whatever derogatory, judgmental, and critical opinions still remain in our consciousness brings us closer to higher knowledge. We advance even more quickly if, in such moments, we fill our consciousness with admiration, respect, and reverence for the world and life." Steiner, R (1904): *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds*, Anthroposophic Press, p. 20.

So we may represent Steiner's views on devotion or reverence in the following way:

Devotion /
Reverence to:

Truth and
Knowledge

The Good and
Positive in all
things.

The World

All Life

Steiner makes it clear though that this reverence is not a stand alone moral quality - it affects cognition itself as well as its special forms as per modules 1 & 2. For him it is this fundamental feeling that opens up our ability to know the World as well as ourselves: as this is a particular type of sympathy, it opens up the knower in order that they can know the World. Antipathy on the other hand closes the knower off from this possibility.

For a teacher, parent or carer in the context of Steiner Education, this feeling of reverence or devotion opens up the possibility of a genuine striving to **understand** the children as they develop both as individuals as well as beings in their specific age phase, temperament and social context. Such a feeling is also the ground for acquiring real knowledge of the World which can then become **authentic** content for teaching which, as we have seen, is central to being a Steiner / Waldorf Teacher.

Contemplating the World – Active Inner Life

Steiner also describes another capacity that a person may develop in themselves in order to find access to the real nature of the World. The aim of this practice is to deepen one's connection and understanding of the World. Rather than contemplating one's own inner life, this is an activity directed towards the World in its great diversity: to spend a few minutes each day allowing one's **perceptions** to be recalled in **memory** and letting them become part of one's **inner consciousness**. The kingdoms of nature: mineral, plant, animal and human begin gradually take on deeper significance through this activity: "In these quiet moments, every flower, every animal, and every action will disclose mysteries undreamed of. This prepares us to receive new sense impressions of the outer world with eyes quite different than before." *Ibid, p. 23.*

This exercise then needs in the first instance a clear and conscious observation of the natural world. Secondly, to bring these observations back into consciousness in memory and allowing them to be for a while in inner quiet, with no associations or random feelings.

For a Steiner teacher, this practice can give an inner feeling and content that may become an authentic source for teaching. This stands in contrast to situations where teaching content is based on the authority of books and which cannot be tested personally. This practice gives the teacher a real and personally experienced content that may become proper educational nourishment.

Service to the World: Altruism

A question that may arise at this point is: who does such a practice, or self-development generally, serve. For Steiner, the answer is not oneself, but the World:

“The purpose is not to accumulate learning as our own private store of knowledge, but to place what we have learned in the service of the world... *Every insight that you seek only to enrich your own store of learning and to accumulate treasure for yourself alone leads you from your path, but every insight that you seek in order to become more mature on the path of the ennoblement of humanity and world evolution brings you one step forward.* This fundamental law must always be observed.” Ibid, p. 24. [My bold]

Steiner enfolds these practices, as well as all the cognitive and moral practices he recommends, in an **altruistic principle**. For him, all his ideas about self-development are not about self-aggrandisement or self-gain, but ultimately about helping the World and all the beings on it.

Clearly, these and other practices, involve working on the Self. But the overall aim is not to stop there, but to Self-Develop in order that the World may develop. The greater one's cognitive and moral capacities are, the greater one is able to help the World.

For teachers in a Steiner / Waldorf School, this means that their own development is intended to help the development of the children. It is in this sense that it could be said that **Steiner / Waldorf Education is enfolded in the Principle of Altruism**. This is true in connection with the teacher's relationships to the children, to the parents and to the content that they teach. **The curriculum and pedagogy in a Steiner School can be argued to be suffused and encompassed with this Altruism.**

Self-Reflection and Inner Tranquillity

Self-Reflection is arguably that process, activity, or daily practice in which one develops self-consciousness and that ability to judge the state and future development of one's thinking, feeling and willing. As we will see later, in his book "The Philosophy of Freedom", Steiner also refers to these in terms of **Character Dispositions** and **Motives**.

The practice here consists in coupling together of both self-reflection and inner tranquillity, or inner peace. The aim is to spend a few minutes a day reflecting on what one has thought, felt and done in the past whilst judging these objectively. This activity is to be enfolded in a feeling of inner tranquillity rather than reliving what one thought, felt or did at the time. The judging is to be carried out with the intent of discovering the difference between the **essential** and **non-essential** in thought, feeling and action from a past situation:

“In these moments we should tear ourselves completely out of our everyday life. Our thinking and feeling lives should have a quite different colouring than they usually have. We should allow our joys, sorrows, worries, experiences, and actions to pass before our soul. But our attitude toward these should be one of looking at everything we have experienced from a higher point of view... We must face ourselves with the inner tranquillity of a judge”. Ibid, p. 27/28

From out of this practice arises a different relationship to our inner life in the course of daily events. Feelings such as anger, impatience, irritation, offence, etc, begin to dissipate or take on a much lesser significance in everyday life. Of course, this only happens if the exercise is carried out with complete inner truthfulness and sincerity.

In this sense, this practice is not just about self-reflection but also self-transformation: it is a process from **cognition** to **ethics**.

Teachers, parents and carers will be well acquainted with the temptation to have negative emotions such as the ones indicated above, alongside the joyous ones of course.

The Self-Reflection and Inner Tranquillity exercise can help with these as well as the thoughts and actions that occur in the course of teaching. The daily practice of Self-Knowledge and Peacefulness in relation to how you were thinking, feeling and acting can change a negative teaching situation into a positive and fruitful one. As all teachers know, the children, parents and other colleagues, as well as the subject content, can be very challenging at times, an exercise such as this can turn difficult situations around for the good.

Meditation: Transcending the Self

The path of self-development is not just about self-reflection, it is also about reflecting, or contemplating the World in a higher sense: it is about **Transcending the Self**. The path to this Steiner calls **meditation**. For Steiner, meditation takes one beyond personal concerns in an attempt to discover a higher reality, a deeper dimension to World and Self.

The main content concerning meditation will be covered in a later lecture / power point, the intention here is to introduce a couple of points about its significance.

If you recall from modules 1 to 3, Steiner considered the human being to consist of body, soul and spirit. Steiner also considered the whole world as consisting of body, soul and spirit in a complex set of ways.

We also saw previously that he also argued that there are different research methods depending on the level of reality concerned. So a question that may be asked here is: how did Steiner envisage the research method of relevance to the soul and spirit? For him, this method is the science of meditation. By this though, it has to be said, he did not mean anything nebulous or mystical, but a discipline intended to be even more rigorous than natural science. This discipline will be described in more detail later on in this module.

Exercises

As a practical exercise you might like to try the following:

- A) Review a particular instance of your life from the point of view of the previously described exercise, i.e. in terms of what you thought, felt and did.
- B)
 - 1) Choose something from nature, such as a rock / mineral, plant, animal or a human being.
 - 2) **Observe** with as much precision as possible;
 - 3) Stop observing it and attempt to **remember** it in all its clarity (you might prefer to close your eyes for this part);
 - 4) Prevent all extraneous thoughts, feelings or associations from entering your mind during these stages and allow the memories to “echo in silence”;
 - 5) Make notes, written or mental, and review your practice. These might be helpful for your assignment.