

Asian Waldorf Teachers' Conference, Seoul, May 2013

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*Out of the gravity of our time
There must be born
Courage for deeds,
Give to your teaching
What the Spirit has given you,
And you will liberate mankind
From the nightmare
That weighs upon it
Through materialism.*

Rudolf Steiner

“Anthroposophy gives us knowledge; however the reality is, we are still just ourselves. We can give tear-jerking lectures on the temperaments but do we know how to transform them ourselves?” This is how Christoff Wiechert, the former leader of the Pedagogical Section, started the Asian Waldorf Teachers' Conference in South Korea in May 2013.

460 practising teachers from Japan, China, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, India and of course Korea met for a week in Seoul to deepen their understanding of the child and their knowledge of Steiner education. Within this, there were two main topics: the first was the understanding of the development of the child and its needs at any specific moment of development; the second was cultivating a deep and thorough enthusiasm for what we teach and how we teach it.

These two thoughts were brought to life over the seven days of the conference.

Christoff spoke about the specific tasks each epoch has had, and the particular task of our time. This, he explained, is to rediscover consciously the human being as a threefold being, of body, soul and spirit. This was the accepted view in the

west the Catholic church proclaimed the human being to be of body and soul only, twofold. Over the past sixty years or so, you could argue that modern science appears portrays an image of the human being as body only, single-fold picture.

He gave the opinion that 'mainstream' education tends to only educate the physical aspect of the human being, hence concentrating on early academic achievement and sport. Countering this one-sided picture of the human being is the challenge of our time.

One of tasks in a Steiner/Waldorf school is to integrate the soul and spirit with the physical body. Steiner puts forward the concept that we can do this through helping children to sleep and to breathe correctly¹.

As teachers we need to have a threefold approach to our lessons which will help our children breathe in a healthy way.

The physical aspect to our teaching is to do with reading and writing; maths, geometry and everything that gives an understanding of life address the soul realm; what is artistic addresses the spiritual realm.

We need to achieve a balanced approach in order for education to be truly health giving, not only academic, which ties the children too strongly to the physical body and not only involving the artistic which can be too 'excarinating' for the children.

A child should approach each new school day with a gesture of wonder and expectation; they should end the day with a wonderful feeling of satisfaction. An aim of the indications which form the curriculum in Steiner schools is to help the soul and spirit connect to the physical body.

¹ Steiner, R. (1996). *The foundations of human experience, lecture 1* (R. F. Lathe, Trans.). Great Barrington, MA: Anthroposophic Press. Lecture 1.

The stresses of contemporary life can make this especially challenging.

In the early years, 0-7, we are helping the child connect to their physical body. Each child needs to feel at home in the physical body. It does this through a healthy development of their four physical senses, touch, life sense, movement and balance². The children are adapting to the rhythms of life and social rhythms. This can give the child a resilience and security for life. It needs to be done artistically; a rhythm is very different from an inflexible beat.

In the lower or primary school, this healthy school rhythm continues. The rhythmical part of the day does not start and end with the morning circle but needs to be throughout the whole day. In the lower classes we are dealing more with the eye and the ear, sight and hearing. Both of these senses work differently within the human being. Too much 'eye' activity will exhaust the child; too much 'ear' activity will make the children excited. There needs to be a balance between these activities.

In the high school, the child begins to connect more strongly to what Steiner calls the astral body³, the emotional life. We do not want this to happen too early any more than we would like the child to be born prematurely.

Christoff ended the week with saying that our task as teachers was to help children be able to be open to receive the impulse to achieve the tasks they need to do on earth; this impulse comes from the spiritual world.

This requires us as teachers to have a well-developed knowledge of the growing child which we should enliven through our own experience and knowledge of the world. This can lead us to have the intuition and sensitivity to do the right thing at the right time to support the children we encounter.

Over the last ten years there has been an enormous upsurge in public interest in Steiner/

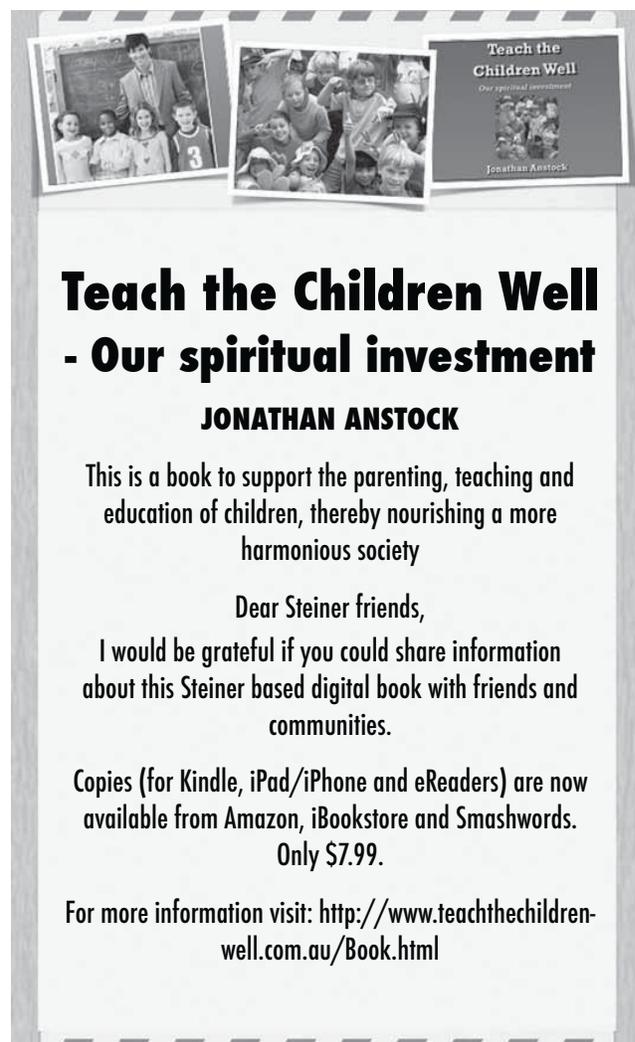
2 For details of Steiner's concept of the senses, see Soesman, A. (2001). *The twelve senses*. Stroud, United Kingdom: Hawthorn.

3 See Steiner, R. (1973). *Theosophy*. London, United Kingdom: Rudolf Steiner Press

Waldorf education in South-East Asian countries and strong growth of anthroposophically-inspired initiatives.

Steiner/Waldorf education can respond to this need. Arising out of the spiritual research and insights of Rudolf Steiner, it offers a holistic education, independent of nation or belief whose aim is to foster free minds, true hearts and brave spirits; to cultivate healthy human beings who will be more than capable of meeting the social challenges of the future with flexibility, imagination and responsibility.

The Asian Waldorf Teachers' conferences support the teachers in these countries in their commitment to develop not only a working practise as teachers but also to deepen their understanding of Steiner/Waldorf education and Anthroposophy. ♦



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