

A rough translation of a book review by Daniel Dominguez who was a Waldorf Teacher in Freiburg, Germany

Title: Waldorf Pedagogy and the Thinking of the Heart: Book review on Mark Riccio's An Outline for a Renewal of Waldorf Education

In 1998 the Anthroposophical publishing company Freies Geistesleben released Florin Lowndes second book The Awakening of the Heart Thinking: The being and life of sense-free thinking in the work of Rudolf Steiner.¹ This book presents the work and joint research of Florin Lowndes and George O'Neil (who discovered Steiner's method of writing and thinking); and gives the results of their work in a systematic and well-ordered format. The special significance of the book lies on the one hand in the fact that a treasure of Steiner's Denk-kunst or thought-graphics are revealed in artistic form. On the other hand, it give a plausible method to those who want a profound and selfless way of working with and internalizing the texts of Rudolf Steiner. Recently a book appeared in the United States that is written and conceived out of this impulse of the Steiner's new thinking. The title is: An Outline for a Renewal of Waldorf Education: Rudolf Steiner's method of thinking and its Central Role in the Waldorf School.²

The author is Mark-Dominick Riccio, who was born in 1968 in New York City, and in his Foreword we hear that this book was his rewritten dissertation which he submitted in 2000 for his doctorate of Pedagogy at Teachers College Columbia University. In a biographical sketch in the first chapter, the author courageously shares with the readers how the original impulse of his efforts root deeply in his own completely miserable education which consisted of being sent starting at age 2 ½ to countless educational experiments and methods of the 1970's, including Waldorf; and with typical Anglo-Saxon understatement he writes: "I found no little irony in the fact that my biography of mis-education has led me to seek a vision of educational reform."

In chapter two, after a short but complete description of Hegel's method of thinking, Goethe's metamorphosis of the plant and Schiller's "play drive" Riccio undertakes a focused introduction to Steiner's organic-living method of thinking, using a few however progressively complex thought-forms from the Philosophy of Freedom. With this he presents impressively before the eyes of the reader not only how Steiner points to the work of his great precursors taking their achievements further to the level of actually grasping the Beingness in thinking, but also how the thought-forms themselves are the bearers of this Beingness - and how through the thought-forms this Beingness, which is the actual content of the text, can be grasp in an increasingly deeper manner. In chapter three and four, Riccio comes full circle and gives an answer to the question which concerned him, as a budding educator, after his encounter with Florin Lowndes and which never left him: If this new thinking - that Steiner called heart thinking- should be his foremost contribution to the renewal of culture and civilization, if it was his "central discovery" as Lowndes confirmed, then must not this thinking necessarily also be discovered within Waldorf pedagogy at its foundational concept and development? And with an introductory write up of his first research results Riccio reveals that in fact a plethora of thought-forms appear within the Waldorf curriculum and methods which contain the same organic-living relationships like those we already saw in chapter two concerning Steiner's texts. Presented in his book are: the corresponding thought-forms for the whole history curriculum spanning 12 grades, the physics curriculum spanning seven grades, the foundational form for executing the main lesson (completely independent of the content of these hours), and as a nice conclusion a form which justifiably puts into question Waldorf pedagogy's own

self-understanding in that it shows the lawful relationship between the developmental process of the growing child during the 2nd and 3rd seven-year cycle and the corresponding school grade and thereby reveals the contradiction (which still today exists) that there is an eight- and even twelve-grade school. Since the school law, which in those days forced Steiner to found a “compromised” school, no longer exists, Riccio felt impelled to point out that Steiner very early in his career point to the importance of a seven-grade school - which if put into practice would have “unimaginably beneficial effect,” Riccio emphasizes, “simply for the reason that it arises out of the real laws of life itself.” 4. In spite of such conclusions, which he had to draw out of his research, it is clear that it is not his intention to criticize the other manifold achievements within the Waldorf movement. Exactly the opposite, since the world-wide Waldorf movement is embattled in a process of rethinking and self-reflection of its own pedagogical essentials. He wants to offer the results of his research as an inspiration for the hope that this new perspective of Waldorf may lead us back to the very hour of birth of Steiner’s new way thinking found in the earliest of his books.

For we can today take in with our best feeling capacities this new thinking, in order to receive inklings, perhaps the first sensations how everything what Steiner, with the help of this thinking, brought forth after his books, and how the Waldorf school and pedagogy must be founded according to this method, and organic-livingly structured, just like his books:

“the Waldorf school is a complete organism and much can be misunderstood about the principles which are in the school if one does not see how the school is conceived as a whole organism..., so one comes to grasp much more of Waldorf education if one knows its principles, its structure the entirety of its organic workings” and “how every single activity is placed in the organism of the school.” 5.

Those have progressed so far with Steiner’s writings and have worked through them, it comes as no surprise how often completely different words of Steiner’s shine with new meanings over and again in a text. Words which seem to be leitmotifs of the author, or perhaps more accurately expressed, a standpoint, his standpoint, which became our own because of hard work, which we absorb through these words and by repetition together with Rudolf Steiner, in order to bring this truth to expression:

“Waldorf pedagogy is not in any way a pedagogical system, but an art in order to awaken what is in human beings. In fact Waldorf pedagogy does not want to educate but awaken. Today the task is to awaken. First however the teachers must be awakened, then the children and young adults. The task is really about awakening, since humanity has been cut off from the evolutionary stream of world-progress.” 6.

With this the other or inner side of the problematic is referred to, which Riccio in his research questions. For he makes clear how important it was for Steiner to speak to his audience from different angles about the pressing need to have a new consciousness for the awakening of forces of this new thinking by the end of the century. And even though Steiner did this - for the most part *indirectly* and in spite of the pressing need - in nonchalant references and riddle-like statements (and had to do this in order to respect the freedom of his listeners), he managed under certain circumstances e.g. in 1923 in Stuttgart before his teachers to express in surprisingly clear words:

“Now you see it is above all things necessary that you really get it: we need here as teachers our own special consciousness ... I would like to say we must work on the Waldorf Teachers consciousness. This we can only achieve, my dear friends, if we can attain particularly in the realm of pedagogy a real experience of the spiritual. Such an

experience of the spiritual is for humanity difficult. We should really grasp that we need something something really special something that is hardly present in the world in order to be able to achieve the task of the Waldorf school. We should in all humility , without pride, arrogance, make this special thing conscious - we can with our heart and inner life become truly conscious....” 7.

How should we work on this Waldorf Teachers Consciousness, and how do we perceive its specialness? Riccio’s observation during his working through the entire corpus of Steiner’s educational lectures found the following facts: how often and consistently did Steiner refer to his main spiritual training manuals The Philosophy of Freedom and Knowledge of Higher Worlds and its Attainment? how he urgently pressed his listeners to take it to heart, and how he must have expected that his teachers would penetrate - through a pursuit of the most possible intimate relationship with these two books - beyond the contents to a deeper experience of their composition, their thought-style itself as a revelation of the very Source itself, which was not discovered in those days although was an accessible source within one’s own consciousness. 8.

For Riccio, as his mentors before him, the decisive question about this new thinking is a completely esoteric one. And this question is in fact an esoteric one in a two-fold manner: first, in a more general meaning of the concept (esoteric) it is modestly hidden; further in the spiritual scientific sense it is that which “is for us the safer and more exact way” which can lead to the purely spiritual of the etheric as a very important intermediate stage as Steiner calls in his Occult Science. 9. This is an enlivening of the senses which brings with it consequences that are predominant and unavoidable: if the key to this new thinking remains unrecognized. If its discovery continues to be ignored how will it be possible to develop a free and healthy esoteric life in the wide front of the Anthroposophical Society? (It is an esoteric which every normally organized human being without further prerequisites can do with “good will” and with every step which is worked through in thinking and thereby can be overseen and is self-regulated!) 10. For everything else which can be called specific anthroposophical esotericism i.e., the six exercises to the Class Readings, arose out of this new thinking with the heart, was shaped by it, and filled with its life. Must this thinking not then serve as the foundation Steiner “wanted to create upon which such results could rest” and thus are required for our spiritual work? 11.

In the concluding chapter five, we find Riccio’s concrete and practical thoughts about the future of the Waldorf school, its goal setting, and esoteric mission. The starting point, writes Riccio, for carrying out this goal is a teacher-training center. Only he imagines it as deviating from the norm - similar to the philosophy schools of Greek antiquity. These schools arose out the mysteries and in that sense were led by a completely different type of teaching staff than the earlier teacher-priests of the mystery-centers. The teachers in those days experienced the necessity of the challenge of bringing in a radically new world-method and means of self-education and in the strongest sense of the word a thinking which underlies all other disciplines in order to attain an education of a new member of the soul appropriate to the times, then however to educate gradually this thinking itself into a universal mean of communication. Riccio seems to want to experience with this comparison out of the past is that the similarity of consciousness is intensified in today’s situation and thereby also the difficulties which such a project far into the future must be accompanied were during the times of the Greeks the attainment of logical thinking and the education of the Intellectual Soul still natural processes, embedded in a general evolutionary event. So in the times of the Consciousness Soul on the way to the new mysteries, completely individual and purely out of thinking, willing hearts can foil the

oppositional forces.

According to the insight of Steiner, to attain a self-medium and a medium of world-knowing, and applying it, corresponds today's necessity of the times, although to most unfamiliar stretching centuries into the future, where should we find today on the this narrow path a sufficient number of fellow comrades who possess the technique of the new thinking, who have used it already, and so capable of work as a founding college? The only correct answer to this question is the obvious and quick conclusion that this first step to founding such an institution and fulfilling the task cannot be undertaken right away. And still: citing Johann Gottlieb Fichte, who believed it would take thousands of years for humanity to employ his suggestions, Riccio remains convinced that the mission is completely do-able if individuals are willing to undertake Steiner important call to change the way in which we approach his books – regardless of how many decades this will take.

If we succeed, first of all, to work increasingly with the compositional aspects, instead of doing it in the typical way of remaining in simply in the content; if in working with the compositional element in our anthroposophical study groups, in their various forms, the emphasis is laid more and more on the acquiring of capacities instead of an piling up knowledge; if in the teacher training – in particular the further research and the ever deeper understanding of the curriculum as a living totality – not only according to the manifold insights into the alternation between main lesson and skills classes, however, if this is done in this way - since it is recreated out of an artistic understanding (which could be completely fruitful in combination with the arts and, that is, in the experience and recognition of what Rudolf Steiner really meant with the word “artistic”) – only then adds Riccio summarily when finally the teacher trainees not only grasp the curriculum contents but from the very beginning of their training start practicing attaining an ever more conscious ownership of the entire Waldorf pedagogy in the same ideas structure with which Rudolf Steiner developed it, only then will a time come in which we can have a true modernization of the pedagogy and the school itself. More importantly a time will come for a increasingly essential concept that the 8 grades elementary four grades high school is a compromised arrangement and we need to transform it into a fourteen grade school which Steiner called truly healing and thereby possibly a possible step toward ‘modernization.’

Such considerations are what Riccio constructs in the idea-gestalt of the Waldorf school of the future. He hardly imagines a school which is only in parts a “living whole” but sees the teachers as moving together in the stream of living thinking.

In as far as they can lift themselves up to a shared spirituality e.g., the way they treat each other and gradually influence their students soul lives (what they bring with them already in terms of heart thinking), then they will truly be able to work together and as a consequence of their consistent practicing and applying this new thinking to new situations - and doing this creatively in all aspects of the school such as in every single classroom, in the discussions about students, in the faculty meetings, even in the financial and leadership aspects.

If this were to happen in an increasingly effective manner, then there would arise a consistently growing and far-reaching network of schools, - then there could be an even higher level attained just as was once achieved in Ancient Greece in their educational institutions in which logical thinking of the Greek language was carried far and wide into the world. According to Steiner estimations there should be developed during our age an international “mode of understanding”; this knowledge should be, indeed, radiating out of anthroposophical institutions and schools - a language of thoughts – which no longer requires breath and no longer lives in a

physical medium, but moves according to Steiner “in the element of light, flowing from soul to soul, from heart to heart - more is meant than poetry here.” 14.

This would be an amazing height which for the time being many a hurdle would have to be jumped on the way to a goal which may be labeled as the ultimate mission of any self-conscious anthroposophical striving that Rudolf Steiner brought in a direct relationship with Waldorf praxis. This is why Riccio is concerned to a large extent in bringing our attention to this mission of Steiner’s: “if one approaches reading the way one does today, then one damages all spiritual progress.” 15. What Steiner is talking about here is nothing other than that “it is time for the world to be able to arrive again at the initiation principle within the other principles of civilization. And that is why it is necessary the human being is able to remain in the spiritual, unlike in the case of profane pedagogy.”15.

Perhaps it is necessary in considering this last point - which is a kind of high point of the content - to have as a conclusion a question which seems to be pressing. And even if the answer to this question was already given more or less everywhere in this text and needs to be rewritten, we can point to a concrete example which illustrates the existential dimensions of the theme of this new heart-thinking. It is the question of the so-called “new children” and other appellations one gives them (Indigo) and whether or not they are truly new, or whether