

«Supporting the development of pedagogical skills through music and study of child development»

Contribution at the ITEF meeting on October 22nd by Philipp Reubke

Jon McAlice's contribution in September addressed the question of how pedagogical skills can be promoted during teacher education.

Theoretical knowledge of pedagogy, the history and philosophy of pedagogy, anthropology, and subject-specific methodology is certainly an important part of training, but it is not enough to teach skills for interacting, of being with children in a certain way.

I would like to follow up on this and contribute two examples from my (rather limited) practice as a trainer in the field of early childhood education. First, I will discuss music and singing, and then the study of Steiner texts on anthropology.

It is well known that, according to some of Steiner's statements, the interval of a fifth is considered to be important for development in Waldorf kindergarten education. (See, for example, Neil Boland's work on this topic <https://www.waldorf-resources.org/en/academic-publications/early-childhood/music>)

However, theoretical explanations of the mood of the fifth and singing exercises to experience the qualities of intervals did not convince many students. For them, the methodological suggestion remained external and theoretical.

Only a more playful, experimental approach to sound that appealed to their own initiative ultimately promoted sensitivity in listening: a suitcase with stones, pieces of wood, metal rods, gongs, various flutes, bells, and plucked instruments, with which more or less structured games and improvisations could be played. There were also blind games, movement games, and spontaneous sound accompaniments for simple stories.

For the students, this meant first becoming active themselves, but through play in a way that simultaneously encouraged listening. Learning to be active and receptive at the same time, allowing their own activity to be influenced by what they heard.

Music educator Reinhild Brass has many years of experience of this kind, first as a teacher and then as a trainer.

“It is not I who play, but the sound that makes me play. Of course I play, I am both playing and listening at the same time ...” “You could perhaps call this state passive activity” (Reinhild Brass, “Trusting Listening”, edition *Zwischentöne*, Weilheim 2023).¹

This sentence makes it clear that this type of listening and sound play does not only develop music teaching skills. Isn't “passive activity” also an essential teaching skill? Not just teaching the material, but speaking and acting based on the children's perceptions...

In the educational course in Ilkley, Rudolf Steiner emphasizes the importance of artistic skills in education. Not just to engage in artistic activities with the children. But also to convey the

subject matter well, drawing and painting skills. And to be in constant contact with the child, musical skills.

“And so a pictorial, imaginative element must dominate all that the child is given to do; a *musical* quality, I might even say, must pervade the relationship between teacher and pupil. Rhythm, measure, even melody must be there as the basic principle of the teaching, and this element demands that the teacher must himself feel and experience this ‘musical’ quality.”² ... “It is a matter of orienting the entire lesson in a rhythmic way, of the teacher themselves being, one might say, a musically inclined person, so that rhythm and beat really prevail in the classroom. This is something that must live instinctively in the teacher in a certain way.”³

Second example: Study of Steiner texts on anthropology. Do we have methods that help ensure that the observations and concepts developed here do not remain external to the students, but stimulate their thinking? Martyn Rawson made important suggestions on this in his ITEF contribution in February.⁴ All of them aim to familiarize students with concepts through their own activity, through “formulating for themselves”: 1. Formulate what I already know about a topic. 2. Formulate in my own words what I think I have understood from Steiner. 3. Compare Steiner's concepts with those of other authors. 4. Formulate whether and how my understanding of the world and humanity has changed.⁵

The question is, however, how students can relate to Steiner's terminology between steps 1 and 2. What he said and wrote is in the context of Central European culture at the end of the 19th and 20th centuries, during the pioneering phase of the anthroposophical movement. For many people today, what he says therefore remains as hermetic as the fifth interval for people who have never played music.

In my experience, it is helpful to incorporate at least three additional steps after step 1: 1A: The teacher educator describes how she or he understood the Steiner text in question, what touches her or him personally about it, why she or he considers it relevant in the context of life and time experience. 1B: The students read the Steiner text. 1C The students engage with the content developed there in a playful, artistic way. For example, trying to say the same thing but in different words. Trying to use shapes and colors to explain what they have understood. Writing words used in the text on pieces of paper and asking others to put them in a certain order, etc. Do something to not just stick to the words, but to get into a train of thought. All of this is to help you take steps 4 and 5 described by Rawson.

² <https://rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA307/English/RSPC1943/19230811p01.html>

³ *ibid*

⁴ https://www.goetheanum-paedagogik.ch/fileadmin/paedagogik/PDF/19_2_25_Martyn_Rawson_ITEF_EN.pdf

⁵ Original: 1. Downloading existing pre-knowledge as starting horizon. 2. Empathic understanding – put into your own words. 3. Dialogic understanding – context, relate to other ideas. 4. Transactional: how has this changed me, my understanding? My new horizon.

¹ See also <https://audiopaedic.de/>