

Developing Pedagogical Quality – but how?

Introducing the handbook *Pädagogische Entwicklung durch Praxisforschung*

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Lead: Thomas Stöckli and his team at the Institute for Action Research in Switzerland have developed a method to develop the educational quality of teaching. There is now quite a number of helpful methods for quality evaluation at Waldorf schools but these focus primarily on the development and evaluation of management structures. They do not consider how each teacher can develop and evaluate the educational quality of their own teaching. The new handbook fills that gap and introduces the method in detail.

The following article is based on twenty years of experience and includes a number of examples derived from practice. Further detail can be found in the online version of the handbook (1). (Only available in German. Ed.)

A Quality Management Method for Education

The handbook outlines the basic principles and methods for educational research and quality management which have been developed and published by the Institute for Action Research in Switzerland. It is aimed at teachers and trainee teachers. Rudolf Steiner used such a method with the first college of teachers and described its spiritual foundations in *Supersensible Physiology and Balance in Teaching* (2).

What is Special about the Connection between Anthroposophy, Waldorf Education and the Scientific-Academic Context?

The handbook brings together the anthroposophical method of self-development, the development of teaching and schools and academically recognised quality research and merges them into a unity which will be understood at Waldorf schools and universities alike. (3) This can be a crucial element for the accreditation of schools and teacher education institutions because it will ensure that their scientific and undogmatic approach is recognised without compromising on the core of Waldorf education or the anthroposophical spirituality. On the contrary, they are central elements of quality development and research.

The Key to Anthroposophically Enhanced Action Research

Firmly rooted in practice! The child at the centre! And all that in the little time left besides school and private life! So, please let's not create more stress for the already very busy Waldorf teachers. These were precisely the issues we had in mind when we created the handbook as a key to educational research. At first, the key might not be easily understood but will become clear in practice as it is based on the following six aspects or recommendations:

1. Developing pedagogical quality starts with the **child** because it has to serve the child. Educational encounters with children are always at the centre.
2. It is important to **review** the lesson, either immediately after teaching or in the evening. Further, a weekly review with written notes are part of good practice.
3. The teacher connects 1 and 2 with **spiritual research** and all of her **experience**.
4. **Subconscious learning** as well as morning and evening meditations are added.
5. Personal **intuition** leads to new insight (with the help of '**moral imagination**') so that ideals do not remain merely abstract but become real, concrete **ideas**.
6. Now, **educational impulses** arise for day to day teaching practice and suddenly the teacher knows "what's next" (as Rudolf Steiner describes in the second lecture of *Supersensible Physiology and Balance in Teaching*). We then start to experience **educational inspiration** born out of this holistic process and oriented to the needs of the child or the class.

Image of handbook p.36 (1)

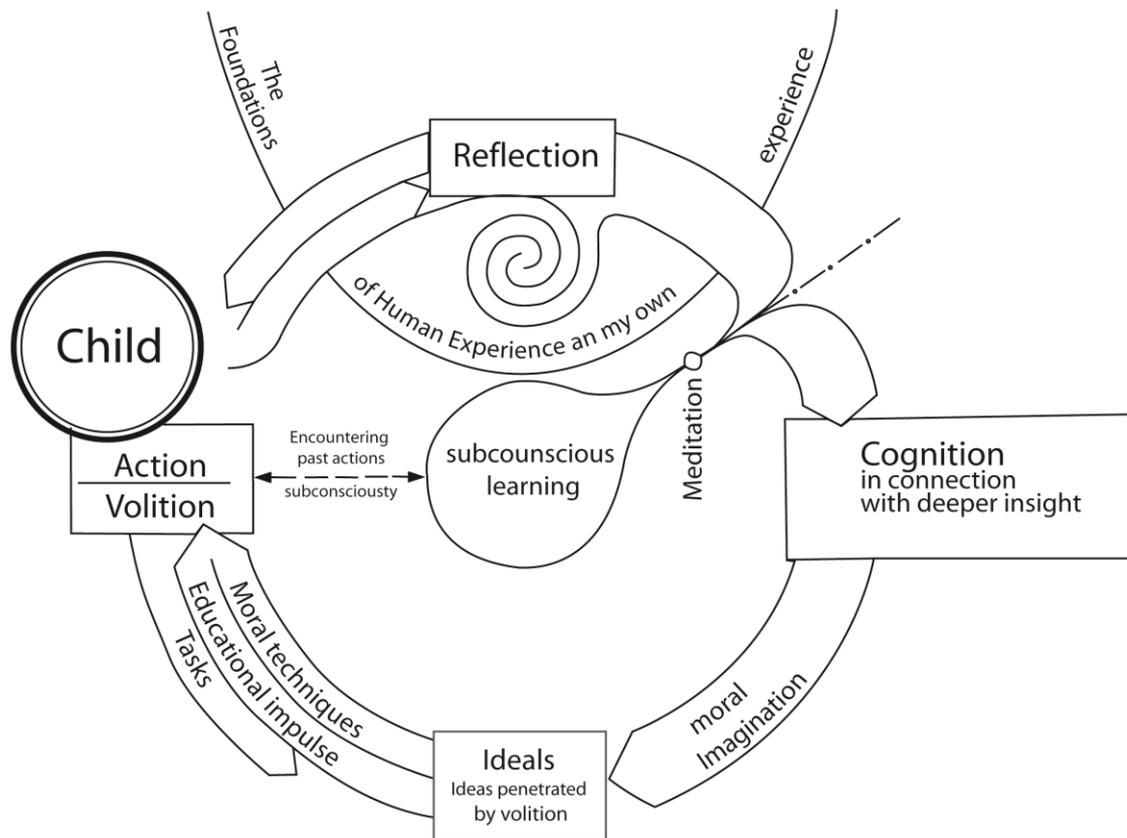


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Teachers' Classroom Experience

In the past few years, many teachers and especially students at the teacher education centre AfaP in Dornach, Switzerland (4), have studied this method, have reflected on their own teaching and, as a result, have improved the quality of their teaching or have implemented some educational research.

I know a class teacher who, after twenty years of teaching, now focuses on working with the parents and has established new forms of communication at his school. There's also a young teacher who has taught a whole form-drawing main lesson block in a foreign language. Another teacher has challenged himself to better support some pupils in maths and has developed new teaching sequences for practice lessons. A young teacher who grew up in a First Nations Reservation wanted to improve conditions for First Nations children and has developed new ideas for the Waldorf school at the reservation (5). Another teacher has implemented a geography immersion project with the subject teachers of her class. The grand finale was a festival of music, dance, food and guests from Africa – a profound experience for everyone involved.

It is important to start with your present situation and not look too far afield. Identify an area which is most pressing for you or which you feel enthusiastic about or for which you have an inner calling. Then start to use the research key, systematically yet in your own individual way. As a further example I want to quote a maths teacher who has begun this path of practice.

The Path of Self-development in Action Research – a Concrete Example

I will now quote from a research paper by a maths teacher (6). Here, he focuses on a multi-dimensional review which includes 'learning through emotions':

'I try, in retrospect, to not just reflect upon my actions but also on my emotions. How did I feel when I demonstrated the construction task in the geometry lesson? Did I have fun and enjoy it or did I already think about recess without being there wholeheartedly?'

After the review it is also important to preview the next lessons: *'The retrospect exercise normally generates new ideas. I become aware of what went well and decide to act in the same way in the future. However, what has been will not happen in the same way again and so I try to find out what the most precious aspect of my action was. I try to discover the underlying value and imagine how I can implement it in a different situation.'*

Learning in imaginative ways is very important for teachers: *'For example, I realised in retrospect that if I slow down when I explain something, the pupils pay more attention. I understood that I could use this element when I want to emphasise something important. I imagine how I will face the class the following day. I imagine what the central aspect of the lesson will be and how I will speak - inwardly and outwardly calm - in order to emphasise this particular point.'*

Learning also means to learn from our own mistakes and to envisage an improvement without any feelings of regret. This is how actual quality development happens in education. *'Of course, past situations in which I failed could also inspire me and give me new ideas. For example, I spoke too fast which meant that the pupils missed the crucial point in my presentation. So, I imagine that I have all the time in the world for this particular point and I am taking my time to speak, to enjoy the act of speaking and to emphasise each individual element.'*

Thus, the practitioner arrives organically and step by step at a meditative dimension: *'The image of my future actions which I create myself is really important. This is why I try to preserve the ideas I arrived at through reflection as emotional images. I repeat them frequently so that I will not forget them. I try to keep up a clear image on which I concentrate and focus. The continuous repetition of positive emotional images is already part of meditation. Ideally, this encouraging repetition is practiced just before getting ready for bed. This helps to position the positive emotion, which we have consciously created, close to our sleep.'*

At this point 'subconscious learning' begins: *'Up to now we have consciously created and reinforced a certain emotion, an emotional image. This image can now find its way into our subconsciousness. If we manage to concentrate well on the underlying value of the emotional image, the value might become part of ourselves through subconscious learning. This is why it can show itself in a different situation the following day.'*

The effect of this path of self-development, and the development of quality which is connected to it, appears as a holistic process: *'It can happen that the value we have brought to our consciousness now reappears in a different situation. This might not happen consciously but 'just happens'. Without really thinking about why I am doing it I am speaking slower in meetings when I try to make an important point. Or perhaps I speak faster in suitable situations. If I have really absorbed the value, I don't need to go through the whole process of retrospective, reflexion and imagination of an individual situation in order to have a new idea. Sometimes, a muddy situation suddenly becomes clear. On this level we cannot always explain our new conviction and intended action but we know intuitively that it is the right one. We have thus made a deep experience and have truly absorbed some new insight.'*

This example shows how action research is put into practice as a path of self-development and how

the development of educational quality takes hold of the human being in every dimension, in thinking, feeling and volition. Furthermore, it has become clear that this research method is directly connected to the anthroposophical path of self-development. If the teacher learns and develops, she inspires the children, according to Steiner's words: 'Every form of education is self-education.'

References

(1) Stöckli, T. (2012) *Pädagogische Entwicklung durch Praxisforschung. Ein Handbuch*. Stuttgart: edition waldorf. www.institut-praxisforschung.com (only available in German)

(2) Steiner, R. (2011) *Supersensible Physiology and Balance in Teaching*. Literary Licensing. GA 302a. First Lecture. Please refer also to the article by Michael Grimley in Journal No. 59 of the Pedagogical Section.

(3) Christoph Wiechert in *Teaching – The Joy of Profession*, published by Verlag am Goetheanum, also explores how the anthroposophical path of self-development can be used in educational practice.

(4) www.afap.ch

(5) <http://lakotawaldorfschool.org>

(6) The quotes are taken from an educational research paper by Jonas Brüllhardt, a mathematics teacher in the middle and upper school.