

## The Development of Waldorf Education in Colombia: its Values, Challenges and Needs



Colombia is a place full of natural and cultural biodiversity. It enjoys all climates, has thirty-six moorland landscapes, and is surrounded by the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. Its surface is crossed by three extensive mountain ranges, numerous navigable rivers, many minerals, and lush vegetation. Among others, three major regions stand out: Antioquia with its capital Medellín, the Cundinamarca highlands where the country's capital Bogotá is located, and Valle del Cauca where the city of Cali is located. Even so, the country suffers from social injustice, corruption, and over-exploitation of its natural resources by national and multinational companies.

Colombia is immeasurably rich because of its multi-ethnic and multicultural condition; we live together in three ethnic groups: the Afro-descendants who are the majority, the indigenous people of the Nasa ethnic group who stand out for their organisational power and their struggle for the recovery of their ancestral lands, and the mestizo ethnic group. Alongside this richness, there have also been historical conflicts over the influence of drug trafficking, paramilitaries, guerrilla groups and, more recently, illegal mining.

Quality education is for minority groups, due to its high cost. Education lacks adequate policies for children, youth, and adults. This motivated us to start a path of preparation as teachers of these initiatives. For many years we worked, studied, and met with groups of educators in each of these regions, to form the preparation and foundation for the birth of the training.

From 2016 to 2018, the training was born and began its first itinerant cycle, at Colegio Luis Horacio Gómez in Cali, at Colegio Campestre Montecervino in Chía and at Colegio Isolda Echavarría in Antioquia. The purpose of the training of early childhood teachers is to provide refuge for the children, through the conscious work of the participating educators to create a healthy environment for the child. It is our commitment to accompany three cycles of training. We also receive students and teachers from different parts of the world.

For the consolidation of the Waldorf Teacher Training in Colombia, we have had the support of the Association of Waldorf Initiatives of Colombia, the International Association for Waldorf/Steiner Early Childhood Education-IASWECE, the Pedagogical Section at the Goetheanum, and the Friends of Waldorf Education. In addition, from the very beginning, we have had the support of numerous mentors from Latin America, the United States and Europe, who have enthusiastically accompanied the development of Waldorf education in Colombia.

The pioneer school opened its doors in 1977 in the city of Santiago de Cali. Since then, Waldorf education has continued to grow year after year in multiple initiatives, some more established and others incipient, but all of them with a clear commitment to Waldorf education, wanting to educate children in a healthy and caring way. Several initiatives are in rural and mountain environments, allowing close contact with nature as a fundamental part of a child's education.

Our educational community is made up of families from diverse economic, cultural, and social backgrounds motivated to provide their children with an innovative education in line with the needs of today's generations, that responds to the demands and challenges of today's world.

The families face situations of poverty, marginalisation, and social exclusion, 70% of them being victims of the social and political conflict in our country. We implement Emergency Pedagogy actions to attend to the psychosocial health of families. This option has allowed us to consolidate actions to defend and protect the human rights of children and their families.

All the initiatives work closely with each other, and we are happy to be part of the large educational community in favour of the young child.

With fraternal greetings,

María Rita Aristizábal, Yaneth Beltrán and Marcela Osorio

On behalf of all the initiatives belonging to the Association of Waldorf Initiatives of Colombia

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