

Kyrgyzstan: “Now we know what Waldorf education is!”

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Kyrgyzstan was always a transit country for goods and cultures. The highly desired goods from China were taken along the Silk Road to Persia and the Mediterranean countries, and other goods from the Mediterranean and Mesopotamia were transported back to Southeast Asia. There, where today the capital city of Bishkek lies, Kyrgyzstan offered a great bazaar, where exotic goods were displayed, unpacked and traded. Even today this is the largest bazaar in central Asia. Along with the goods and those who sold them came the cultures of the other people, their religions, literature, and music were taken in and passed along. In this way, Kyrgyzstan developed its own spiritual culture, with an ancient epic poem, *Manas*, that still today offers a sense of identity to the country. Children learn to recite it, beginning in kindergarten.

For 30 years, Waldorf education and curative education have existed in Kyrgyzstan. At first this was concentrated in a curative center called *Nadjeshda*, where their co-workers have been and continue to be trained. Over the years, individual co-workers founded a small curative center or a kindergarten, based on Waldorf pedagogy. Thus a need arose for Waldorf training, at first for the kindergarten, which began in 2006. Today we are running the third training course, for kindergarten and grade school teachers. For more than two years the participants have come from different parts of the country and Kazakhstan, for eight week long seminar courses that take place in the rooms of Arabaeva University in Bishkek.



In the third year, the participants come twice and are visited in their own work, to see whether they are able to put what they have learned in the training into practice. The training is carried by colleagues from Germany, Russian and from Kyrgyzstan itself. Instruction is in Russian or is translated into Russian.

Of the 30 participants in the current course, 22 will present their final projects in November 2017. If they successfully complete the third year, they will receive a certificate that is also signed by the Kyrgyzstan Minister of Education. Among the graduates are co-workers from Nadjeshda, from Waldorf kindergartens, child care centers and after care centers that want to work on the basis of Waldorf education, as well as others working for example in municipal kindergartens and see Waldorf education as a fruitful alternative to the conventional Soviet-influenced state education.

One great difficulty of training in a country like Kyrgyzstan is that the participants have no opportunity to experience a real Waldorf kindergarten. The seven Waldorf kindergartens in the country are all just at the beginning and need support for their own development. In the past year, it was possible for two participants to do a practicum in a Waldorf kindergarten in Moscow; they returned satisfied and enthusiastic and reported in their training classes about their experiences.

Now they say - and they know - what a Waldorf kindergarten is. One simply must see the rooms, the play materials, the colors; hear the songs and games; feel the atmosphere. We want now to make this possible for as many of our graduates as possible and are thinking about making this a requirement in our next course.



The *Central Asian Waldorf Seminar* plays a special role - it is a public seminar that always begins in early June. It started in 2003, at first in a small space, in order to foster collaboration among Waldorf educators in neighboring countries. From this there has developed a public seminar with up to 100 participants that now has established a stable presence in the cultural life of Bishkek. With lectures, discussion groups on the lectures, shared eurythmy and social games, and a rich diversity of working groups on pedagogical, practical and artistic themes as well as question and answer sessions, this Seminar offers those who are interested the possibility to get to know Waldorf Education. Those

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acquainted with Waldorf education and participants in the training courses can then expand upon or deepen the individual themes. One main theme always run through all the seminar courses. This year it was *The Surroundings as a Pedagogical Factor*, an important aspect of Waldorf education, that was viewed from various perspectives.

In addition to the participants in the training course, other colleagues in the Waldorf initiatives also participate, as well as many people who view the seminar as an opportunity for personal development and come year after year. About one quarter of the participants each year are there for the first time. Many of them come again the following year.

Slowly a group of trained Waldorf educators is growing in Kyrgyzstan and one can hope that they will carry Waldorf Education in their country and continue to develop it further and take over the training courses. But this will not happen quickly here. In Kyrgyzstan things take time. The people understand quickly what it is about, above all with their hearts. And they understand it in doing, are able to apply it by imitating and copying it. But it will be a long road to full autonomy.

There is still no Waldorf School - only the curative school of Nadjeshda – that can demonstrate where Waldorf education leads. At the moment there is a new initiative to found a Waldorf school. And the teachers are hopeful. At the moment a young man from Kyrgyzstan is training to be a Waldorf teacher. When he completes his training he will return to Kyrgyzstan to become a teacher.

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