

## Surprises and a Wealth of Improvisational Capacity - Ingredients of the Waldorf Movement in Zimbabwe

Florence Hibbeler

Some years ago, Dr. Florence Hibbeler came to Zimbabwe to establish a medical facility for a private agency helping small farmers in rural areas. There she encountered many women who cared for children in the villages, more or less on a voluntary basis. Since she was acquainted with Waldorf Education in Europe, she made it possible for these women to do practicums in South African Waldorf kindergartens, and she invited Waldorf early childhood educators from South Africa, Europe, and the USA to come and give introductory courses. One of the village women, Anna Marunda, completed a Waldorf training course in Nairobi, and today Waldorf elements are integrated into more than 20 kindergartens in Zimbabwe.



In one of her working reports, Florence Hibbeler wrote:

“What Nana Goebel wrote so accurately in her editorial in the spring newsletter of the “Friends of Waldorf Education” also describes our situation: the development of Waldorf Education throughout the world confronts obstacles - not enough trained Waldorf teachers, powerful structural and pedagogical obstacles from the governments, and a lack of effective breadth or qualitative consciousness or a strong group of parents prepared to question conventional indoctrination regarding learning, abilities, and career. All these characteristics are present in Zimbabwe, with the addition of a chronic lack of money, because the population cannot recover from the economic crisis which is based on corruption, and there is seldom a reliable administration to be found.

“With this as a background, I am active and engaged, am happy, suffer, wait, hope, and occasionally threaten, and am prepared to turn things over to local hands as soon as a warm-hearted AND competent AND reliable honest soul catches fire for this initiative. And it needs to be someone who has enough time, because the people I know thus far all need to struggle for their daily bread.

“Sometimes I just have to take hold of myself and remind myself of ALL that has actually happened and been achieved already and is so precious, even if only as a seed or a “template”, viewed spiritually.

“The projects: in 2016, in addition to the efforts made for a school, a large working area was added: the kindergarten movement. Gilbert Guvakuva and his wife, Hlekisani, together with Anna Marunda in Rusape, agreed to offer an intensive one-year training for about 30 kindergarten teachers. We received generous support from the “Friends of Waldorf Education”, IASWECE, and private donors, and were able to finally begin in June 2016, after lots of back and forth. Thirty women participate regularly, more or less, as life is complicated, in the monthly Saturday seminars, the one-week courses held three times a year during vacation, and in large gatherings three times a year sponsored by WECMZ, the Waldorf Early Childhood Movement Zimbabwe, which in the meantime has more than 60 members. In addition, there have been and continue to be local meetings of women, sometimes with parents, above all in Rusape, where Anna Marunda lives, as well as mentoring in the kindergartens and opportunities for practicums.

“It is great to experience Gilbert and his strengths as he presents the theory in small doses, according to the capacities of the women, yet nonetheless challenges them with tests and homework assignments, and how Hlekisani and Anna Marunda share the riches from their own practical experience and training.

“All the trainers are paid a small honorarium for their work, in order to achieve a certain quality and joy in participation; the amount is laughably insignificant when compared to their costs of living.

“For 2017 as well, more than 30 women have registered for the course. However, there were surprises that required a certain capacity for improvisation - travel to the course was too tiring and dangerous for some of the participants, so we divided the course into two parts. The course now takes place in Chitungwiza, at the edge of the city of Harare, as well as in the Ruaspe area. It does not make sense to offer courses in December, as everyone is busy with plowing and planting for springtime. On weekends, the travel costs double between the city and the countryside. The government is trying to regulate private kindergartens more strongly, and now all practicing early childhood educators are required to attend a two-week professional development course during their vacation time. We therefore had to change all the dates for our Waldorf courses.



“Nonetheless the work continues intensively - Anna Marunda is always much appreciated as a mentor in the Ruaspe area and receives inquiries from many interested parents and educators. She offers workshops and introductory courses in her own kindergarten. Gilbert and Hlekisani travel as mentors in the other regions.

“We are grateful as always for the collaboration with the Friends of Waldorf Education, ACACIA, IASWECE, Fundo, Inc., the Kiel (Germany) Waldorf Teacher Training Seminar and all the loyal friends and acquaintances who make all of this possible - I greet you all throughout the world!”

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Florence Hibbeler is a medical doctor from Germany and has nurtured the development of Waldorf education in Zimbabwe for many years.