

Love in Education
Pole beans need sunshine and so do the little children

Philipp Reubke



Anyone who sows pole beans in Switzerland in March won't be able to enjoy the fast-growing climbing plants. It's simply still too cold for them to germinate. Whoever wants to help a sow give birth during the Norwegian winter must seal the barn well and hang an infrared lamp. Anyone looking for investors for a modern sailing ship that brings organic spices and coffee from the Southern Hemisphere to Europe must inspire enthusiasm.

This also applies to education. Whoever takes care of young children in the family or in a childcare setting will not get very far with stress, worry, and profit calculations. With joy, generosity, and a warm relationship with parents, colleagues, and children, favourable conditions for development arise. Steiner observed in 1907 that "joy and delight are the forces that draw out the physical forms of the organs in the right way."¹ "Cheerful expressions on the educators' faces and, above all, sincere, unaffected, love.

This love brings warmth to the environment and, in the true sense of the word, this love broods on the forms of the physical organs."² Simply put and oft quoted, but, in reality, a major challenge for life at home, in daycare, and in kindergarten. A colleague from Vienna said that in Waldorf daycare, we need "professional friendship" and "professional love" for parents and colleagues. Occasionally, love, friendship, and soul warmth bubble up on their own. But for some parents, colleagues, and children, the well runs dry. And yet the small child needs this for his or her unfolding, just like the seeds of the beans. This love and warmth are what make attention and care effective. For educators, therefore, being professional means becoming a sun that always shines on everything—and doesn't leave the pole beans in the shadows for a day.

I Am the Source of My Warmth

Everything comes down to whether the adult in the daycare and kindergarten can generate love—beyond mere sympathy or antipathy—as an effective feeling through inward activity. It is much more difficult than hanging up an infrared lamp. Carl Rogers has offered many suggestions for cultivating this attitude, which he calls empathy.³

Much can be found in Rudolf Steiner's work, too. For example, in the collection of essays, *How to Attain Knowledge of the Higher Worlds?* (which, when considering many passages, could also

be titled, "How to Become a Waldorf Educator?") he says: "As soon as the feeling arises that someone else is the reason why my source of warmth and light is drying up, as soon as I therefore begin to regard them as an adversary to whom I show harshness and coldness, it would be good to ask myself: what can I do myself to clear away the obstacles and restore the source of warmth and light?" When a child or a colleague constantly bothers me, I try not to feel hate toward them, but rather ask myself: How can I myself behave so that, in the future, they develop and perhaps no longer bother me? ⁴

One reason for the drying up of friendship and love is simply that no friendship or love is shown to me in return. The manufacturer of the infrared lamp only gives it to me when I pay for it. Should my capacity for love also depend on being rewarded for it? Since I want to increase my capacity for love for my profession, I would have to do something to free myself from my addiction to reward and success. Whoever embarks on a path of inner development will meet this task along the way. ⁵ But even those who live or work with small children are dealing with beings who need love as much as pole beans need the sun. It must not depend on reward!

Studying the Child and Childhood

Love must be like the sun, not like an infrared lamp. It could be—and often is—that I accompany the little child with full sympathy and warmth, but what I do in their presence is simply what I enjoy and what I'm especially good at. I knit and crochet for hours; I sing and dance; I paint and play with clay—but what does the child really need at this age, in this context? They need more than just what I enjoy doing and more than the great guy I've become. The chance I have to avoid influencing the child too strongly with my narrow personality is to learn about child development in general and this child in particular—to develop a genuine interest. Through the study of the human being (anthropology), practice research, and by observing children, I can temper my one-sidedness and also develop the light-nature of my sun. That way I give the child no longer just what I want to give, but more and more what this child needs. Or, as Steiner put it in one of his last essays: It would be wonderful if we were a little less concerned with pleasing ourselves and pulling ourselves in a favourable light through what we are doing. If we were not just concerned with the "proud feeling of manifesting oneself in the action," ⁶ but more with doing what the world needs, "by affirming the world," as he says, then we strengthen love, which becomes ever greater love for the outside world. This does not mean, however, that life in kindergarten and engagement with society must become a 24-hour sacrifice. "[A person] finds themselves not by seeking themselves, but by uniting themselves in love voluntarily with the world."

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But suppose we take this to heart and regularly strive to understand the children and the child so that our love might then be a helping love. Our learning will still be constantly hindered, our understanding constantly muddled by a different kind of pride. How often do I think I already know everything and so no longer listen properly, no longer observe devotedly, without prejudice; I cling to favourite opinions, to conceptions I formed years ago and which I love because they're mine. Only unbiased observation and attentive listening lead to reality in learning and love.

The Daily Social Workshop

For a hundred years, Waldorf kindergartens have provided a unique preparation for lifelong learning and loving. Plenty of time and space is given to play, initiated by the children themselves. Every day, the children experience (rather than analyse and understand) how their own behaviour and idiosyncrasies determine their relationships with others, how their shyness and tyranny often isolate them. Free play is the daily social workshop—an intensive preparation for social responsibility and collaboration— not just for the north-south spice trade. During free play, adults welcome the children's initiatives; everyone does whatever they're currently motivated and inspired to do; no one receives rewards; there's no competition. Love in action, for most of the day. And an attitude of inquiry and striving for understanding are also practiced in the Waldorf kindergarten. Free play is very often about learning something: How does a board stay on two chairs? What happens when I throw the plate on the floor? What does the water in the puddle do when I throw a stone or myself into it? How does the earth feel when I make a hole with my finger before I put the bean seed in? And just listening to the wind in the trees and the piglets emptying the compost bin—without explanations, without interpretations: an important preparation for researchers, whose quick judgments and explanations often hinder their further learning.

Learning to feel connected, even with opponents; learning to engage without depending on rewards; learning to hear and see the surroundings; letting my behaviour be oriented by what I hear—learning to love: seeds from the Waldorf kindergarten for social responsibility.

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Footnotes:

¹ Rudolf Steiner, *The Education of the Child in the Light of Spiritual Science* in *The Education of the Child and Early Lectures on Education* (Hudson, NY: Anthroposophical Press, 1996); first published in *Lucifer-Gnosis*, no. 33; now in GA 34 (forthcoming in English).

² *Ibid.*

³ See, for example, Carl R. Rogers, *A Way of Being* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980) or *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961).

⁴ Rudolf Steiner, *How to Attain Knowledge of the Higher Worlds?* GA 10, translated by Thomas O'Keefe, Clifford Venho, and Julia Selg (Tiburon, CA: Chadwick Library Editions, 2020): "If I am a teacher and my pupil does not live up to my wishes, then I should first direct my feeling not to the pupil but to myself. I should feel at one with my pupil to such an extent that I ask myself, 'Is this pupil's shortcoming not perhaps the consequence of my own action?'" Instead of directing

my feelings toward the pupil, I will reflect on what I should do so that in the future the pupil can be or live up to my expectations.”

⁵ Ibid.: “Success is only crucial when we act out of desire. But all actions motivated by desire are worthless in relation to the higher world. Here, love for the action is the sole decisive element. All that impels the esoteric student to action should come to expression in this love.”

⁶ Rudolf Steiner, *Leitsätze—Leading Thoughts*. Bilingual Edition, GA 26, translated by George and Mary Adams, rev. Thomas O’Keefe (Arlesheim, Switzerland: Ita Wegman Institute, 2024), *The World Thoughts in the Working of Michael and in the Working of Ahriman*” (Nov. 16, 1924).

⁷ Ibid.