

Impressions about Waldorf Early Childhood Education in South Africa

Mary-G Häuptle



From the work of the Centre of Creative Education CFCE¹

Louisa Feiter of the Samara Foundation partners with the CFCE to bring training to teachers in the under-resourced rural areas of the Eastern Cape, enabling them in turn to offer children safe and nurturing spaces. During the workshops, teachers are shown how to upcycle unwanted materials so as to add to their extremely limited equipment. They make toys and knit much-needed blankets out of fabric cut-offs and old t-shirts. Workshops are followed up by mentoring visits, and teachers are encouraged to enroll for further courses.

Teacher training offered by the CFCE (both locally in Cape Town and out-reach) are experienced as life changing. Many students are reminded of times past, when the home was filled with stories, song, laughter and play. For most it requires a paradigm shift as to how we approach the small child, our inner gestures, and the recognition for the need to continually develop oneself as a practitioner – this is often a new concept. Waldorf education is generally seen as a shining light of possibility for inner freedom, coupled with a sense of deep personal responsibility and care for the children.

With our common humanity in mind, wherever possible, in both our schools and training centers, exchanges take place between people with different lifestyles and backgrounds from various parts of the country and from abroad. For all of us, embracing our own heritage and exploring which seeds to take for the future from our diverse cultures is an ongoing quest.

Nicole Sparks, teacher of one of the kindergartens at Michael Oak Waldorf School in Cape Town, describes how, last year in 2019, they celebrated both diversity and 100 years of Waldorf Education:

Our kindergarten chose the theme of 'Nourishing Communities' as a celebration and honoring of 100 years of Waldorf Education. The children in our care come from various communities in Cape Town

¹ The CFCCE offers training for Waldorf teachers, Waldorf kindergarten teachers and eurythmists. For many years it has also offered introductory courses and mentoring for women working with small children in the townships.

and we were encouraged by this to celebrate our rich diversity, and to think of others.

In the first term, each child kindly brought packages of food to add to a crate. Once we collected 100 items, the crate was donated to a local feeding scheme for vulnerable children.

During the month of Ramadan, we asked our Muslim parents to share some of their customs. They told stories of fasting, doing good deeds and sharing – all important aspects of the holy month. Each kindergarten class cooked a large pot of soup and made sandwiches to donate to an orphanage. The children were then invited to taste dates and other Cape Malay traditional treats.

Solidarity among Waldorf schools in South Africa

Each year the Class 10s at Michael Mount Waldorf School in Johannesburg do a community-based project to support other Waldorf schools. For the last six years they have been going to Lesedi Waldorf School to build classrooms, paint and help with various projects.

The school is situated amongst the sandstone hills of Madietane in Limpopo, about 340km north of Johannesburg. On approaching the small village, one is overcome by the tranquility and beauty of the environment. Beyond the incredible rock formations is the golden veld where donkeys and cattle roam freely. During the day, the sound of the bells round their necks is heard, and early in the morning one is awoken by the crowing of a cock and the bleating of a goat. It's hard to imagine that in this undeveloped rural setting, a thriving Waldorf school exists.

However, some 30 years ago, Emily Moabelo started a kindergarten here, after completing her Waldorf training in Alexandra township at the then Baobab College. Her father was a Lutheran minister whose congregation made the church available to the school on weekdays. Here, tribal tradition and European theology found its meeting point. There are now two kindergarten classes and a primary school. Boarding facilities house 120 children from neighbouring villages and most teachers, while others are from the local community and travel daily to school. Lesedi, which means 'light', is a much loved and cherished part of the Madietane community.

Monique Muzariri, Michael Mount pupil, describes one of their projects:

When we first saw the playground, it was very sad. Literally everything was brown and bare. I wondered – how can little children have nothing to play with – and I think we all decided right there and then to work hard and give something to these children so that they might have a memorable childhood.



We worked well together. On the first day we almost finished building the Wendy house; the painting group painted two layers of white on a brown wall; the tyre-tower group assembled all the pieces; and the sandpit group almost finished digging a hole for the sand.

There was only one downside which was the scarcity of water. We could only take one-minute showers, and already that was too much. We began to feel really grateful for the resources we have, and take for granted.

Throughout the camp we experienced love from the children of Lesedi. They were always smiling and if you opened your arms they would all come in and give you a great big hug. On our last evening we lit a bonfire and entertained them. We sang songs together, Nathan told a wonderful story which Dominique acted out, and we enjoyed our time together. It's this kind of experience that makes one realize that it's the little things in life that are the most important.

We had completed a play area, which made us all extremely happy, and on our final day we introduced the children to their new playground. At first they looked shocked and didn't know what to do, but once they became used to the new environment, they had the brightest smiles, and that made our job so worthwhile. This camp was life-changing. We were able to give children something we could never take back, and that is what love is all about.

Mary-G Häuptle was a Waldorf early childhood teacher in Cape Town for 20 years before joining the early childhood faculty at the Centre for Creative Education. She is also the Waldorf early childhood coordinator in South Africa offering support and mentoring and is the South African representative on the IASWECE council.