



Diane Walters MA

www.teachingintothefuture.com

The Tin Man and the Human Heart: Teaching into the Future, Artificial Intelligence, and Waldorf Approaches to Resilience.

In the Age of the 'Digital Revolution', Waldorf education continues to hold core human values related to human development at its heart. As technologies rapidly grow and the world moves to realign its systems of governance, education, and economy, the age-old question of what it truly means to be a human being remains vital. At the forefront of the future of Waldorf education is the effort to maintain the values of love, trust, imagination, collaboration and common sense. I will bring a few of these tools to light in an effort to cultivate core resilience to meet the emerging future.

We are living in times of great transition, uncertainty and exponential change. The ground has shifted and we need to find new ground to stand on, distinct from that of a reductionist mechanistic view of the human being. An education grounded on a view of human beings as evolving towards a greater degree of consciousness, development and

potential. This requires a more holistic multifaceted, integrative living approach to learning.

As an educator I try to sense and actualize the emerging future in order to best serve students who will come of age and be directly guiding humanity in the near future. So I began to learn more about Artificial Intelligence, the advent of AGI and AIS, the Internet of All Things. About a year into my quest I realized that this time the giant we are facing with a slingshot is Big Tech and Big Data companies which seek to assimilate humanity into a grip of algorithmic control by taking ownership of users' data and turning it into profit with the help of sophisticated data analytics. I discovered that they can effectively manipulate users' behavior en masse — which is then sold to the highest bidder. This is no surprise. What was surprising to me however is our human response to it. Many seem to think this level of assimilation is par with human evolution rather than human devolution of our individual and collective moral values. Cell phones, smartwatches and smart glasses are on the rise and here to stay until they are replaced by bionic eyes and body parts; thus incorporating the human with the machine.

So, is technology the problem? Not really. The problem is the lack of awareness of our individual and collective humanity that we fail to consciously take into account when we design and expand our technologies. Profit trumps human morality. In his research for the book 'David and Goliath' author Malcolm Gladwell tells us that the giant is blind and cannot see what is in front of him; namely a small boy with a slingshot.

I asked myself the question, "What is bigger than the Big Data of Artificial Intelligence? What is in our slingshot? The answer came in little waves; the integration of the human capacity for love, self reliance and transcendent creativity through artistic processes. Our very humanness is what Big Tech Algorithms cannot see. The balance between our humanity and our technologies lies in the values we live by and impart to our children.

We could think of it this way, dramatic though it may be - it is a question of learning through life or death. The *life* pole in learning or education, brings freshness, a vitality for growth, curiosity, laughter, play, rhythm, story, nature, a sense of community, imagination, the arts, connection with others, attention, warmth, and movement to name just a few. Rudolf Steiner held these ideals to heart: *"We must not let the children receive from us finished, ready-made ideas, feelings and capacities, but ideas, feelings and capacities that carry within them all the possibilities of growth."*

The *'death'* pole, on the other hand, brings reduction, cold fact, cemented concepts, dubious corporate interests, algorithms, screen time, disconnection, social isolation, distraction, virtual realities and avatars, not to mention what's coming around the corner - the merging of humans and machines. This death pole can be seen in what former google strategist James Williams calls 'The absence of aloneness.' He argues that the threat to human freedom has emerged in the systems of intelligent enticement originating in algorithms that increasingly direct our thoughts and actions. Williams states that as digital technologies have made information abundant, our attention has

become the scarce resource – and in the digital “attention economy,” technologies compete to capture and exploit our mere attention, rather than supporting our true goals.

In contrast, American Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “You are your Attention.” In *Self Reliance*, considered to be his most influential work, he states: “To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all ... That is genius. Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost.”

Being with your thoughts requires alone time. Thinking time. When allowing children to engage with the distractions of the attention economy, they risk losing touch with the experience of what it is to be truly alone with their thoughts. We risk losing to big data the richness of our interior lives, let alone our human heart-based connection with others. James Williams writes: “The experience of empty space allows for the growth of imagination and independent thought, the ability to form ideas without being swayed by mass opinion. Moreover, virtual connection impedes our ability to connect and empathise.”

Otto Schwärmer, pioneer of the Presencing Institute states: “According to studies, fear, depression, and anxiety disorder grow in rough proportion to the use of social media. The more social media you consume, the more at risk you are, particularly as a young person.” Like the Tin Man, from *The Wizard of Oz* who searched for a heart, human encounter enabled him to find love and purpose.

Waldorf Education holds a vision for the human being as a consciously evolving species. This model affirms life-giving and life-creating principles through the realm of the human experience of goodness; of

the beautiful, through art and nature; and of truth, based on the human striving to become one with the earth and sky and all things inbetween. This vision lies in the transformation of our thinking, our feeling and our deeds. Schwärmer asks, if we truly want to build back better, if we want this moment to give rise to a future that is different from the past, what core capacities do we need to build and cultivate now?

Rudolf Steiner, founder of Waldorf Education, talked about education in terms of learning through the head, the heart and the hands cultivating genuine human intelligence. Waldorf Education really strives to bring about a transformation of our thinking, our feeling and our will into higher capacities of thought, emotional resilience and capable endeavor which seeks beneficial collective and collaborative change. To develop our capacities of speaking and listening through the center of ourselves into the periphery of our world is rather like breathing through key signatures of expansion and contraction in our being. We can teach through the breath at home or in a classroom setting. What are expansive activities and learning modalities? What are contractive; leading us back into the core of ourselves for reflection and insight? Learning and teaching through the metaphorical heart and lungs has the capacity to bring emergent fresh insights into our educational experience whether as a student or a teacher. Human intelligence far surpasses computational intelligence. The deeper capacities of genuine human intelligence are based in the light of insightful dialogue, creative approaches as a community of people with diverse interests and capabilities. It is to be found when we engage and collaborate with others on any level, at any and every age and brings the light of imagination to the fruit of our conversations and engagements. Subservience to a computer dominated world, complete with

algorithms which capture our thoughts, feelings, desires and fantasies, threaten our fragile connection with the heart of ourselves, one another and our highest level of human growth from the inside out.

I believe that the heart of humanity is to be found through the natural rhythms of human development. It cultivates a slow-growth education which allows for the balanced development of the threefold human being.

The dependence on screens makes online education gravitate towards fostering abstract and technical concepts that lack a deeper connection with our humanness. A level of technical proficiency and access to technology is required to access information which is presented in a format only loosely connected to human relationship. I believe that it is imperative to bring warmth of heart and cultural meaning to all forms of education today. The human story will be greatly influenced by how we choose to educate our children. Stories are our birthright and the means by which cultures across the globe have taught upcoming generations with wisdom and guidance. They are the backbone of human imagination and collaboration; two significant traits we have developed since the Paleolithic age. Across time and culture, stories have been agents of personal transformation in part because they change our brains. The Princeton University cited that in 2010 Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences study, the psychologist Uri Hasson and his Princeton University colleagues had a graduate student tell an unrehearsed story while her brain was being scanned in an fMRI machine. Then they scanned the brains of 11 volunteers listening to a recording of the story. As the researchers analysed the data, they found some striking similarities. Just when the

speaker's brain lit up in the area of the insula – a region that governs empathy and moral sensibilities – the listeners' insulae lit up, too. Listeners and speakers also showed parallel activation of the temporoparietal junction, which helps us imagine other people's thoughts and emotions. In certain essential ways, then, stories help our brains map that of the storyteller.

Steiner repeatedly spoke of how images ARE the learning point and the turning point of knowledge. That is why we work with images behind the alphabet and create stories to teach our children to remember every subject from geography to his/herstory, to mathematics in Waldorf schools. Pedagogical stories (stories created to affect human behaviour) are often used as an approach to bring positive changes to behavioural strategies for children. Taking it to the next level of an artistic process allows us to integrate those pictures through our inner life.

Waldorf education strongly develops the life of the heart along with the development of body and mind through artistic endeavors. The view that the actual process of becoming human - a work in becoming wholly oneself over time - is centered in the experience of the human heart in all its frailties, vulnerabilities, capacities, triumphs and achievements. Thinking with our heart-forces cultivates the capacity for inspiration. This is commonly held close to the arts.

All mediums of artistic expression can open the child's heart and soul to an inner experience of deep feeling. Music is essential to the development of the finer tones of our hearing and ability to rise above ourselves through sound. Drawing, painting, poetry, song, instrument, sculpture, handwork (knitting, sewing, beadwork, weaving, spinning, felting, woodwork, carving, clay, stone, metal) are all components of art

which fill the soul with finer qualities of our human experience and the gift of wonder. They cultivate *hand intelligence* which brings fine motor skills to balance. In this digital age, these human capacities are essential modes for inner expression and emotional resilience.

Bringing our ideas and thoughts through to expression by creating forms for ideas to live in and be seen is the quintessential process of human invention and purpose. In a virtual reality where we can invent an alter ego, a virtual avatar which exists only in the realm of thought, is robbing our children and youth of necessary skills to thrive in the natural world.

Working with building projects using any medium, planting gardens, making one's clothes or fixing them, cooking, baking, anything made by children themselves, gives rise to hand intelligence and the confidence to create what is needed for themselves and the world. The projects are limitless when a living curriculum is alive with story and art and redefines our notion of what success looks like. Fostering inner resilience through outer deeds was once a given, now it needs to be a conscious choice in educating our children.

Social media is educating our children to a high degree and algorithms are increasingly influencing the nature of our desires, interests and lifestyles. What are our moral definitions of success? How we raise our children to be good human beings and members of society is up for discussion and we need to discuss it rather than give way to machine 'intelligence' over the capacities of the human heart.

I believe that we are all educators. We are all students. Whether we term ourselves mentors, learners, parents, or teachers, the world is on offer on every level of human understanding, place and time. We are living in a time of unprecedented change and if we do not want to be swept off our feet or simply led by algorithms, we need to find our stillpoint of quiet certainty in which to breathe and live and create and educate our children into an emerging future which still holds core human values at the centre of our purpose and directives.

It is all about being human and rising to the highest of human striving, heart's intelligence, and ethical deeds in this world. Teaching into the future means building and creating deep ties and co-creative relationships of belonging to our place and time. It is a whole approach to learning; one which calls for interest, attention and presence of mind.

Rudolf Steiner once commented that we need to overcome the illusion that we are limited human beings. He invited us to imagine ourselves as a process in the cosmos " ... a breath drawn by the universe." How can we build these deep relationships not around ideologies but around the real-world challenges we face?

Growing our capacities for thought, stories, stillness, art, human connection and finding the inner voice of our Spirit gives us the power to reshape the future as it emerges.

Jennifer Gidley who wrote a tiny book called 'The Future: A Very Short Introduction' stated it beautifully: "We need to imagine a world where we look for the good and ensure the education, health, environment, agriculture and all aspects of society are based on the simple

understanding that we have many common grounds that are intrinsic to the core of being human. Rather than the insecurities and biases that currently dominate we can change the narrative and create a Future View that is full of optimism and potential, where the obstacles and insecurities that are writhe today have moved from our lexicon and only remembered as a way from the past that we have left behind. This is the view for individuals, communities and whole societies, that unites us and allows a capacity to seek ways to work together. This creative, 'transmodern' educational vision offers one way forward to consciously facilitate the emergence in children of more life-promoting, integral, spiritually aware forms of consciousness."

Like the Tin Man, transcendence is within our reach if we have the courage to write and tell our stories about a human heart-centered world of love, belonging, and wisdom. Our children depend on our reimagination of a future which holds what it means to be truly human at the core of it or we risk losing our freedoms to the colonizing forces of Artificial over Authentic Intelligence.

Copyright © 2020 Teaching into the Future