

Waldorf Education in Zimbabwe

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Kufunda Learning Village – a village community on a farm near Harare. This colorful, diverse twelve-year-old community of young people has always stayed in close communication with the villages the young people came from, villages where, among other initiatives, simple child care centers were opened to take care of the many AIDS orphans.

2010: Two kindergarten teachers from Kufunda - simple women with no formal education - heard about Waldorf education for the first time. Because they were so enthusiastic about what the doctor from Germany described, she paid for a trip for them to go to South Africa so that they could do a practicum in a Waldorf kindergarten in Cape Town.

Thus slowly but steadily the Waldorf movement began to grow. At first it was limited to the Kufunda kindergarten, because the two kindergarten teachers had returned from Cape Town and insisted on bringing what they had learned and experienced into practice. In the following months, five two-day seminars took place and were met with great interest.



An informal two-day seminar in 2010



The following year, three kindergarten teachers travelled to Johannesburg for a practicum. In 2011 the first weeklong intensive course took place in Kufunda, led by two Waldorf teachers from Johannesburg.

At that time, there were concerns in the village regarding the course content and the funding, so that from the beginning not only kindergarten teachers but also interested mothers and personalities from the community attended the course. Slowly the mood changed, as the families and communities experienced the changes in the children, who now were not only taken care of but also experienced a health-giving Waldorf education.

Kindergarten teachers in the countryside work on a volunteer basis, and after the economic collapse of 2008, there is no more money to buy a warm daily meal. With the limited materials they already have or can afford to buy and with their own heart's blood and the support of their villages, they have managed to open eight kindergartens in the countryside, four near the city, and several more are in the early stages of development. After an additional intensive seminar in Kufunda in 2012, one of the most promising teachers was able to begin her Waldorf training at the Mbagathi Waldorf School in Nairobi, Kenya. In the meantime, in the midst of the very large flock of children she cares for in a tiny space, she has become a key supporter for all the training activities.



Kindergartens in Kufunda (left) and in the surrounding area (above and below)



In 2012 a Waldorf kindergarten opened in Harare, with a fully trained Waldorf kindergarten teacher, a Shona Zimbabwean who had returned home from Cape Town. This was made possible through the generous invitation of a white Zimbabwean woman who had also returned to the area and offered the use of rooms in her home for a school. We called this initiative "Nyeredzi" – a Shona word for "Shining Star".

The very experienced kindergarten teacher was immediately ready and willing to have our Kufunda women do two-week practicums with her. Eleven women have taken advantage of this opportunity. A combined first/second grade class was added last year, with an enthusiastic little group of children from Kufunda and a very experienced elementary school teacher who is working with Waldorf elements along with the kindergarten teacher.

Thus, for the Kufunda parents - after the first doubts and financial concerns were overcome and the children began to blossom - a long held dream began to come true. They had always hoped that the Kufunda values of respectful living together with room for self realization and joy in living and learning would also be possible for their children in their education, rather than suffering in the regular schools with their lack of stimulation and which are filled with fear and blows.

Since Nyeredzi was founded, one-day seminars have been held on Waldorf topics, at first on a monthly basis. An average of 15 women participate; they travel the day before from their country villages, spend the night with relatives, and then travel back home again after the seminar to their huts, their fields, and their simple kindergartens.

The strong wish, as in the beginning, is for practical activity - is for making toys or decorations for seasonal festivals or nature tables, as well as songs, circle games, verses. Theoretical content is difficult to transmit - we have tried for years to overcome the belief in authority as well as the English example of sending five-year-olds to a very strict, cold and distant preschool where they are then intellectually overstimulated.

First day of school in Nyeredzi School in Harare on January 15th 2014



This year we were able to welcome an additional teacher, who found her way back to her homeland from Cape Town and now teaches the first- and second-graders, while the earlier teacher has taken over a small group of Kufunda children to start a third and fourth grade class - at first these children were as anxious and speechless as the teachers had feared they would be - they all have three to four years of regular school behind them.



Impressions of the seminars that take place approximately once a month on Saturdays.

Seminar participants are women who come from the surrounding vilages where they care for children. They are taught by Waldorf kindergarten teachers who did their training in Cape Town and Nairobi.

In the meantime, a few city children from wealthier families have found us, but the school and the whole movement are characterized by poverty, humble circumstances, the fight for survival, the consequences of the AIDS epidemic, unemployment, and a sense that there is no escape. Friends and acquaintances from primarily German networks and especially institutions that support Waldorf education have carried this very fine development thus far. For Nyeredzi, the school and Kufunda (with its own international circle of friends) have joined forces, in order to keep the finances and bookkeeping in one pair of hands. In the meantime, we are looking for sponsors for our school children, and we are going through the countryside, visiting our women and accompanying them in their work. With the help of IASWECE's support, we will be able to offer another week-long seminar in August for the Waldorf community, which has now grown to include 12 kindergartens and 30 interested women. An experienced Waldorf kindergarten teacher from the USA will teach the seminar course.



Dr. Florence Hibbeler is a doctor who works six months of each year in various hospitals in Germany and spends the other half year in Kufunda.