

Anthroposophic Curative Education and Social Therapy An Introduction

Andreas Fischer



Anthroposophic Council for
Inclusive Social Development



Education
Wellbeing
Community

Anthroposophic Contributions
to Inclusive Social Development
Booklet 1 · EN

Starting Point	3
Setting Goals	4
Elements of Anthroposophic Curative Education and Social Therapy	5
Anthroposophic Understanding of the Human Being and the World	10
Aspects of the Curative Education Course	16
Anthroposophic Curative Education Worldwide	20
Conclusion	24
References	

Dear friends and colleagues,

I am very glad that we are able to make this introduction to anthroposophic curative education and social therapy by Andreas Fischer available to you in English.

This publication is the first in a series of introductory booklets on various topics in anthroposophic curative education and social therapy that were originally published by the Swiss Association, vahs.

Internationally, there has long been a demand for introductory literature. We are grateful to vahs for making these texts available to the Anthroposophic Council for Inclusive Social Development so that we could translate them for the worldwide movement. Concrete collaboration like this is exactly what allows us to work together and support each other as an international network.

I am also glad that this first booklet was authored by such an experienced and knowledgeable expert and co-developer of our field as Andreas Fischer. A longtime teacher and director of the HFHS in Dornach, he is more qualified than most to present anthroposophic curative education in an accessible way and to introduce its most essential aspects to people who are learning about it for the first time.

I hope that this booklet will enrich our work in the English-speaking world, and that you enjoy reading it!

With warm regards,

Jan Göschel, PhD
Director and member of the Leadership Team
Anthroposophic Council for
Inclusive Social Development

Starting Point

When two people meet and want to get to know each other better, they often begin a process of telling each other about their life stories, life goals, strengths and weaknesses.

This allows for a mutual connecting – a complex process that never ends. It can lead to a true meeting, in the sense of a deep, mutual understanding based on empathy. This requires inner activity in both parties, as well as the willingness to be open, the ability to listen empathetically, honesty, and a capacity for self-reflection. If all of these things come together, they create a foundation for getting to know each other that makes true meeting possible.

Challenges inherent in curative education and social therapy

Specific skills can be helpful to meet with a person who, because of a disability, does not appear to bring the characteristics mentioned above. Perhaps this person's means of communication are limited, or their cognitive processing of events and experiences is hampered. This is characteristic of the challenges inherent in curative education and social therapy: The conditions for getting to know each other as the basis for supportive companionship can be complicated. Getting to know each other as a foundation for true meeting is challenging; a more conscious development of specific competences, as well as a willingness to seek out new and often unfamiliar methods, are helpful foundations for professional practice.

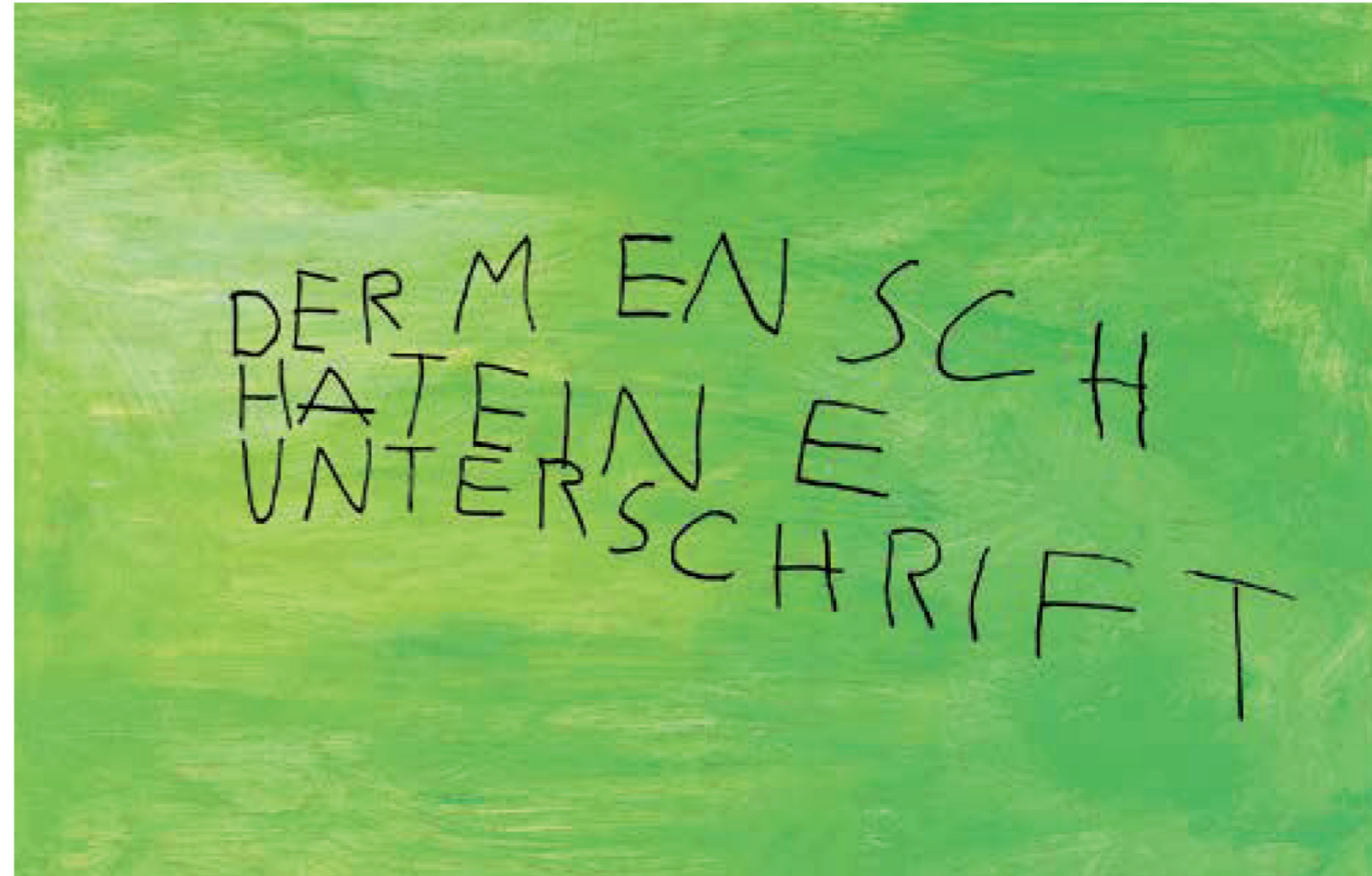
The following questions are crucial when working with people with special needs:

- How can we find a way, together, for me to get to know you?
- What do you want to communicate to me? What can I learn from you?
- How can I understand your verbal expressions and your actions in such a way that their meaning and the needs behind them become clear to me?
- What are important values for you in your biography or life story? What do you want to achieve?
- How can I support and accompany you in a way that works for you? In what areas do you need help and support? What do you want to do by yourself?

I am happy to be alive.

Laura Zysset

Setting Goals



The above questions cannot be answered theoretically – they must always be answered individually, with and by the person with special needs. At the same time, the search for answers must also be influenced by an understanding of human beings. Historically, different perspectives on human beings have led to different approaches to curative education and social therapeutic work.

A brief summary of anthroposophic curative education and social therapy

This pamphlet attempts to briefly outline the basics of anthroposophic curative education and social therapy in an understandable form. The content is listed and weighted based on work with the fundamentals and many years of practical experience. It is also a summary of many written works, some of which are listed below under “Further Reading.” Only Rudolf Steiner is quoted directly in this pamphlet, for ease of reading. The outline is influenced by personal experience, and makes no claim to completeness or universal applicability. It could easily have been shorter or longer, or have had different emphases.

Illustration by Chöying Purtag:
“The human being has a signature”

Elements of Anthroposophic Curative Education and Social Therapy

There are institutions for people with special needs all over the world that base their work on the anthroposophic understanding of the human being, which is in turn based on the insights of Rudolf Steiner, the founder of anthroposophy.

Unconditional recognition of the individuality of each human being

The architecture in anthroposophic establishments is often unfamiliar, and the values conveyed and practices cultivated in schools and communities are not always initially easy to understand. However, closer contact shows us that it is not a matter of a rigid system or set patterns, but rather a process of seeking to realize ideals.

The guiding principle of anthroposophic curative education work is the conviction that the core of a human being, his or her individuality, can never be ill, but only hindered or impaired in its harmonious development. This conviction is reflected in unconditional recognition of the individuality of each human being with special needs, in the way each person and their motivations in life are treated as valuable and worthy of respect, and in resource-oriented support, including appropriate ways of shaping daily life when called for. Artistic activity and experiences are also highly valued, and are consciously cultivated in anthroposophic establishments. Structuring of daily, weekly and yearly rhythms, celebrating annual festivals, and cultivating a spiritual/religious life based on an interdenominational approach that also takes up and integrates the relevant traditional forms of spirituality in context are also an important focus. In working with adults with disabilities, artistic handicrafts and caring for the land and

environment through biodynamic agriculture are of great importance.

Rudolf Steiner's spiritual science as a foundation
Anthroposophic curative education and social therapy are founded on Rudolf Steiner's spiritual science, anthroposophy, which will be explained in more detail below.

Rudolf Steiner describes the concept of spiritual science as follows: "The name 'spiritual science' can be given to the observation of spiritual processes in human life and in the cosmos" (Steiner, 1994b, p. 18). The sum of spiritual scientific knowledge is called anthroposophy.

Anthroposophy

Neither religious persuasion nor faith

Anthroposophy is based on the premise that spiritual activity manifests everywhere – not only on earth in the realms of nature and the human being, but also in the cosmos and its celestial bodies. Rudolf Steiner characterizes the goal of anthroposophy thus: "Anthroposophy is a path of knowledge, to guide the Spiritual in the human being to the Spiritual in the universe" (Steiner 1973, p. 13). This concise characterization makes clear that it is neither a matter of religious persuasion, of faith, nor of disseminating dogma. Rather, it is an active and independent engagement, based on knowledge, with spiritual science as conveyed by Rudolf Steiner.

The word 'anthroposophy' comes from the Greek and means, literally, "wisdom of the human being." It was important to Rudolf Steiner that human beings can become conscious of the full significance of our existence through working with spiritual science.

In addition to a comprehensive understanding of the human being and the world, the focus is on actively expanding the human being's ability to gain knowledge. "The capacities by which we can gain

insights into higher worlds lie dormant within each one of us." (Steiner 1994a, p. 13). Rudolf Steiner presented conditions and ways to investigate this sensorially intangible world in several written works.

The idea of freedom and responsibility

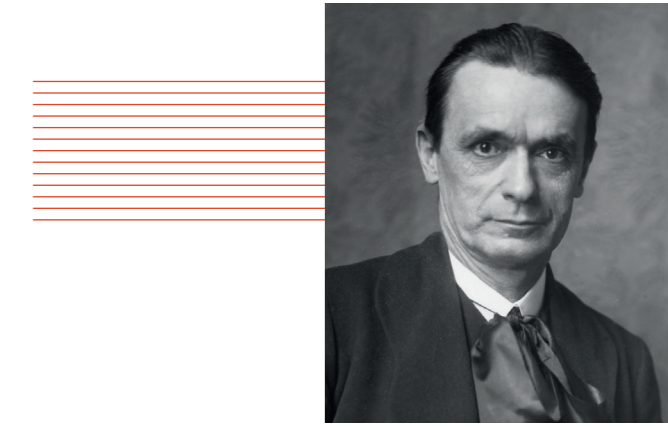
The idea of human free will and the responsibility connected with it are fundamental in anthroposophy. Therefore, it was very important to Rudolf Steiner to connect spiritual scientific knowledge with contemporary science. Engaging with contemporary current events was a matter of course for him, and a requirement for all those who worked with him. Knowledge gained from spiritual science has been very fruitful in many different areas of life, including education, medicine, pharmacy, agriculture, social work, curative education, social therapy, art, science and economics.

Over 700 institutions and organizations for curative education and social therapy

The art forms developed or expanded through anthroposophy occupy a special place here. Rudolf Steiner created a new art of movement, eurythmy; a conscious way of working with language, speech formation; and also gave important indications and suggestions for painting, music, architecture and sculptural design. All artistic activities can be distilled into therapeutic approaches, such as eurythmy therapy, music therapy, speech therapy and art therapy.

Over the years, around 30,000 institutions worldwide have been founded with the intention of applying anthroposophic insights in practice: schools (called Rudolf Steiner schools, Waldorf schools, or Free Schools), curative educational and social therapeutic schools and communities, and workshops, as well as clinics, medical practices, pharmaceutical companies (Weleda, Wala), biodynamic farms (Demeter), banks, art schools, cultural centers, businesses, and many other initiatives. These institutions have a felt connection with the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland, the worldwide center for anthroposophic activities.

With over 700 establishments and organizations for children, youth and adults with special needs in over 50 countries, and over 50 training centers, the international movement for anthroposophic curative education and social therapy has reached a significant size.



A Brief Biography of Rudolf Steiner

Rudolf Steiner was born on February 27th, 1861 in what is now Croatia. His father was a railway telegrapher and later worked as station superintendent at various railway stations south of Vienna. Rudolf Steiner grew up in a rural environment, and after finishing school, attended the Technical University in Vienna. After finishing his studies in Mathematics, Physics, Natural History, Literature, History and Philosophy, he worked as a private tutor in Vienna to four children, one of whom had a learning disability.

Varied and extensive work

At the age of 21, Steiner was asked to edit the scientific writings of one of the most important thinkers of German classicism, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), as part of a complete scientific edition of Goethe's writings. In 1891 he received his doctorate in Rostock on a philosophical subject, and his major philosophical work, *The Philosophy of Freedom*, appeared in 1893. Beginning in 1897, Rudolf Steiner was also the editor of various periodicals and gave courses at the Socialist Workers' Education School in Berlin. As general secretary of the German Section of the Theosophical Society, he developed the foundations of anthroposophic spiritual science in many lectures and basic writings. In 1912/13 he separated from the Theosophical Society and founded the Anthroposophical Society.

Dornach and the first Goetheanum, an organically designed wooden building with an auditorium and stage that was developed over many years, soon became the epicenter of his work. He held lectures and courses on the various areas of life and work there, as well as in many other cities in Europe. After

A Brief History of Anthroposophic Curative Education

The starting point for all anthroposophic curative education work was and is the “Curative Education Course” that Rudolf Steiner held in the carpentry building next to the burned remains of the Goetheanum in Dornach in June, 1924. But even before this course, there were places where children and youth with developmental disabilities were being supported and cared for based on an anthroposophic understanding of the human being.

The birth of anthroposophic curative education

The term “curative education” [German: “Heilpädagogik”], as a general term for professional support of people with special needs, took root in German-speaking areas in the late nineteenth century. Heinrich Marianus Deinhardt and Jan-Daniel Georgens, who introduced this term around 1861, described the field as the interdisciplinary intersection of education, medicine and social work.

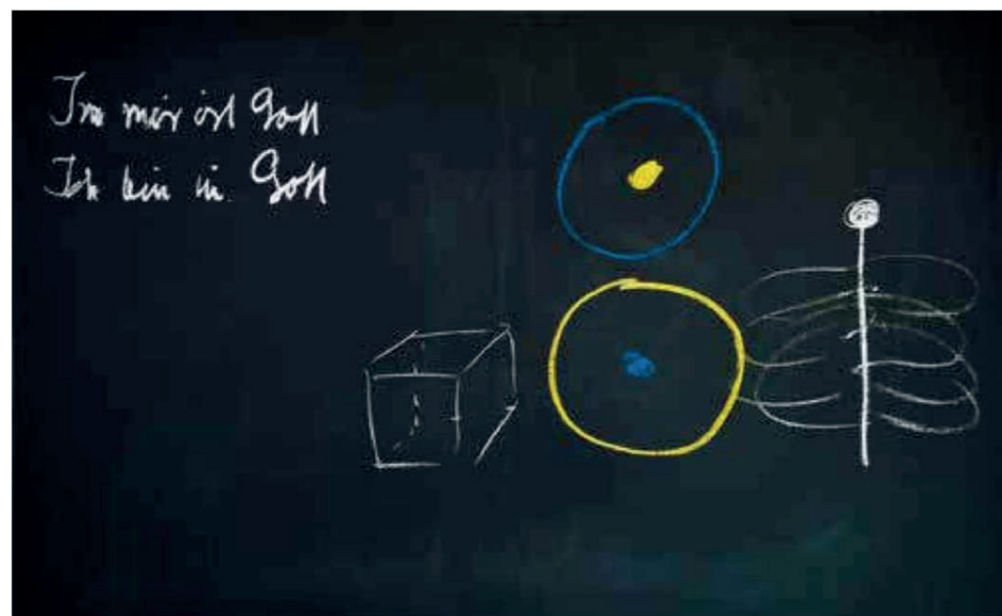
The first Waldorf school in Stuttgart, Germany, opened in 1919, and the first anthroposophic clinic in Arlesheim, Switzerland, founded by the physician Ita Wegman in 1921, were both important to the beginnings of anthroposophic curative education. A so-called auxiliary class for “weaker” students was soon established at the

Waldorf school – the birth of anthroposophic school-based curative education.

WWI, anthroposophy had a strong impact on public life, especially in Europe. In addition to founding numerous initiatives, Steiner’s political commitment to the “threefolding of the social organism” was noteworthy. The first Goetheanum fell victim to arson on New Year’s Eve 1922/23. In the following years a second building with a completely different design was erected in concrete, and this new Goetheanum still serves as the international center of the General Anthroposophic Society today.

Rudolf Steiner died on March 30th, 1925 in Dornach. His works include numerous books and essays, as well as transcriptions of approximately 6,000 lectures, most of which have been published in over 360 volumes in Steiner’s collected works.

Blackboard drawing
“Punkt und Kreis – Meditation” [“Point and Periphery – Meditation”]
from the Curative Education Course by Rudolf Steiner: “God is in me I am in God”



Children and adolescents with special needs were also cared for in the Arlesheim Clinic, a pivotal establishment that later inspired the Sonnenhof in Arlesheim, the first anthroposophic residential home in Switzerland.

Around Christmas of 1923, three young men with initiative— Franz Löffler, Siegfried Pickert and Albrecht Strohschein— approached Rudolf Steiner with the question of whether spiritual science could provide fruitful, practical insights into the support and guidance of people with disabilities. Two of these three young men already had experience in this field. They were employees of Sophienhöhe in Jena, a very well-known institution in Germany at that time for people with special needs. Complications at Sophienhöhe led to the three of them—supported by Emil Molt, promoter of the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart—founding the first anthroposophic curative education facility in Germany: the “Heil- und Erziehungsinstitut für Seelenpflegebedürftige Kinder Lauenstein” in Jena. By Easter of 1924, the prospectus for Lauenstein was completed, edited by Rudolf Steiner.

The term “Seelenpflege”

[special care, literally: “soul care”]

The term “Seelenpflege” was already being used by other authors outside of the anthroposophic context before the “Curative Education Course”, often as a reference to the pastoral dimension of curative education work that played an especially large role in institutions belonging to Christian churches. However, it never became established in mainstream special education. But the term “in need of soul care” (“Seelenpflegebedürftigkeit”) became a trademark of anthroposophic curative education and social therapy. It avoids negative connotations and simulta-

neously indicates the area in which people in need of support require attention. It is interesting that Rudolf Steiner did not use this term in the Curative Education Course, instead using the designations common at the time.

However, the term “children in need of soul care” was used in the Lauenstein prospectus, before the Curative Education Course. Rudolf Steiner took Franz Löffler’s, Siegfried Pickert’s and Albrecht Strohschein’s request seriously and visited Lauenstein in mid-June, 1924. He also promised them a specialized course on curative education, and gave it in Dornach at the end of June, 1924.

Thus, anthroposophic curative education was already being implemented and realized in three locations before the Curative Education Course lectures were given.

These three locations had differing emphases:

- The medical impulse, represented by Ita Wegman in her Arlesheim Clinic
- The social impulse, in the founding of the curative education institution in Jena by the three curative educators, Löffler, Pickert and Strohschein
- The educational impulse—connected with the name Karl Schubert—through the implementation of special classes within the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart.

Curative education and social therapy as independent professions

The unification and interpenetration of these three areas – medicine, education and social shaping of the coexistence of people with and without disabilities – have survived to the present day. However, the emphasis has shifted. Specialists in curative education and social therapy see themselves as an inde-

pendent professional group, and interdisciplinary cooperation is no longer characterized by hierarchy, but by appreciation, equality and mutual complementarity. Even before the Second World War, new facilities were established in Germany, France, Iceland, Sweden, Finland, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Switzerland. However, the further spread of anthroposophic curative education and social therapy was interrupted by the war. Employees of Jewish origin had to emigrate from Germany and Austria as a result of National Socialism; this led to the founding of the first community in the Camphill movement, in Scotland, by the Viennese physician, Karl König. This movement later spread internationally and now includes over one hundred life-sharing communities.

After the war, the 1950s and 1960s also saw the founding of many new establishments outside the Camphill movement in a wide variety of countries.

The Curative Education Course

As described above, anthroposophic curative education was already being realized before the Curative Education Course in the three areas of education, medicine and life-sharing initiatives. The course provided the theoretical and spiritual scientific foundation for the work and made possible its connection to the Medical Section at the Goetheanum. The Medical Section is one of eleven departments of the School of Spiritual Science at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland. Ita Wegman was the director of the Section when anthroposophic curative education was founded. For many years she was proactive in developing institutions, and she inspired many people to pursue curative education. Today, the field

is represented within the School of Spiritual Science by the Anthroposophic Council for Inclusive Social Development, which, in the spirit of interdisciplinarity, maintains close cooperation with the Pedagogical and Social Science Sections in addition to the Medical Section.

The Curative Education Course is not a textbook in the traditional sense

Reading and understanding the Curative Education Course lectures is not an easy undertaking. When he gave them, Rudolf Steiner was speaking to a small group of about twenty people who were already familiar with the anthroposophic understanding and study of the human being. The Curative Education Course is also not a textbook in the traditional sense: It neither covers the whole breadth of curative education fields of work, nor does it contain a classification of the various developmental disorders.

The body, soul [psyche] and spirit as one complete entity

The lectures also make little reference to the state of scientific curative education at that time. The main emphases of the curative education course are a spiritual-scientific understanding of disability, the illustration of approaches to supporting people with special needs, and indications for how those providing support can acquire the necessary skills.

Over time, the term curative education has come under increasing criticism in the context of educational science, as it can be understood to mean that a disability can be made to disappear through good guidance and appropriate therapeutic support.

This problem also applies to most attempts to translate this term, which is commonly used in Ger-

man, into other languages, where it is also often used only in anthroposophic contexts, which can lead to misunderstandings about the anthroposophic approach to accompanying people with special needs. Nevertheless, the term is used in this pamphlet because it has become established in this context and the search for alternative terminology is beyond the scope of this outline. It is therefore important to keep in mind that the verb “to cure/heal” [“heilen”], as it is used in curative education [“Heilpädagogik”], should not be understood in the medical sense of “curing/healing an illness”, but in the sense of wholeness, the inclusion of all dimensions – body, soul and spirit – of human existence.

Structure of the Curative Education Course

The Course consists of twelve lectures that can be grouped into three broad topics.

In the first lectures, Rudolf Steiner laid the foundations of anthroposophic understanding for an approach to people with disabilities. The references to the context and meaningfulness of human biography go far beyond curative education and touch on general and fundamental questions of being human. Following the foundational remarks, Steiner characterized one-sidedness or imbalances in child development and described three polar tendencies – what he called constitutional pictures. These can be derived from the threefold structure of the human organism, as described later. After the remarks on understanding the human being, he introduced individual children, some of whom were present. The other children were described by Rudolf Steiner based on his personal observations in Jena (Lauenstein) or Arlesheim (Haus Holle, then part of the Ita Weg-

man Clinic, now Sonnenhof). In addition to diagnostic indications, these observations of the children also contain information about curative educational, therapeutic and medical therapy.

Self-development for curative educators

The third section comprised indications for self-development for curative educators as a foundation for dialogic relationship building. The dimension of human encounter and relationship building—Karl König used the phrase “meeting eye to eye”—is central to anthroposophic curative education. It is the starting point and the source—and often also the stumbling block and the obstacle—of all activities on behalf of people with disabilities.

Anthroposophic Understanding of the Human Being and the World

Rudolf Steiner gave us a foundation for understanding the human being and the world from an anthroposophic perspective in many lectures and books.

The danger of having an answer for everything

The specific and very comprehensive understanding of human beings and the world in anthroposophy is its strength on the one hand, and its challenge on the other.

In the initial momentum and enthusiasm generated by the study of anthroposophy, there is a danger that people become convinced that they can understand and explain everything and that they have an answer for everything. Rudolf Steiner also points out this danger in the curative education course. With further engagement with and deeper understanding of the contents, however, a statement by the writer Hermann Hesse proves true: “All knowledge and all increases in our knowledge do not end with a concluding period, but with question marks.”

The challenge of engaging with anthroposophy

From the internal perspective, connections, points of orientation and references arise that seem plausible and can convey security. From the external perspective, anthroposophy is therefore often perceived as a closed and self-contained system that seems incomprehensible and inexplicable and makes an approach difficult. From the internal perspective, however, it becomes clear how challenging it is to come to terms with anthroposophy and how differently and individually Rudolf Steiner’s statements can be interpreted. Below, individual aspects of the understanding of the human being will be characterized very briefly. More detailed descriptions can be found in many publications, a selection of which is listed in the References section.

The Spiritual Dimension of the Human Being

Steiner understands human beings as fundamentally threefold – consisting of body, soul and spirit. This results in an expanded perspective on human existence, as it includes a spiritual dimension. Although this dimension is beyond our everyday thinking, it can often be experienced in encounters between human beings.

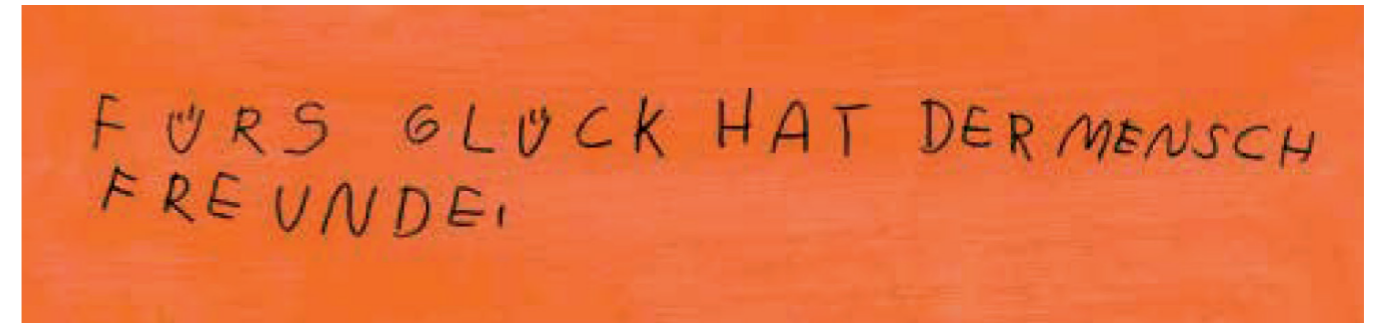
Body, soul and spirit are each subject to different conditions: “The body is subject to the laws of heredity; the soul is subject to self-created destiny or, to use an ancient term, to its karma; and the spirit is subject to the laws of reincarnation or repeated earthly lives.” (Steiner 1994b, p. 89).

The human being is not only a product of environment and genetic disposition

This view is especially significant in regard to people with a cognitive impairment or multiple severe disabilities. For, understood in this way, human beings are no longer merely a product of genetic disposition, of predisposition, or playthings of the environment. Our life and our biography are an expression of our spiritual core, of our individuality. As human beings, we each live in our individual bodily situation and the social conditions that shape us. Both are part of the starting point of a development which is not accidental but can be understood as an individual realization of spiritual intentions.

The meaningfulness of destiny

This means that each biography or life story has an inherent meaning or purpose, even if we cannot see it at first glance. The individual life purpose shapes



a person’s life path, and is, in the broadest sense, a self-chosen destiny. So a person’s biography—successes and talents, but also failures and limitations—is no longer haphazard chance, but rather carries a deeper significance.

However, it is a gross misunderstanding to conclude that “each of us is the architect of our own fortune.” The idea of a self-created destiny cannot and must not be simply applied to all human situations – otherwise it can quickly become presumptuous or cynical. Karmic relationships are much more complex and require a dimension of thinking beyond guilt and atonement.

Destiny relationships are beyond our knowledge

There are also situations in which outside influences lead to a disability or limitation. In early childhood, many children experience not only neglect, but also major interference by other people, which significantly impacts their further biography and very often leads to a disability. Examples include violence, neglect, traumatic experiences, abuse, and medical malpractice. The extent to which the people responsible for this mistreatment are connected through destiny to the people in need of special care is beyond our knowledge and remains at best in the realm of the speculative. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to explain away a disability or limitation simply by saying that “the person chose his or her disability.”

Curative educators have the task of supporting people in integrating their given situation meaningfully into the larger context of their biography, so that they can achieve a greater degree of creative freedom in shaping their lives going forward. This can only succeed if we refrain from making our own

judgments about the deeper destiny connections in others’ lives, giving them the space to discover and shape these themselves.

An unconditional acceptance of the present situation

Even if a person’s limitations are part of the life path he or she has chosen, we as fellow human beings and as a society must never shirk our responsibility. We have to help where there is a need for help. The meaningfulness of each biography requires from the community an irrevocable and unconditional acceptance of the present situation, but is simultaneously a call for such assistance as can be provided to the person concerned.

Reincarnation and Karma

Rudolf Steiner developed the concept of repeated earthly lives—reincarnation—based on his spiritual-scientific research. In doing so, he began developing the concept of reincarnation not in connection to eastern, e.g. Hindu or Buddhist concepts, but by building on the generally less well-known western tradition of the idea of reincarnation, which stretches from Plato in ancient Greece to Lessing, poet and philosopher of the European Enlightenment. However, as a result of his spiritual-scientific research, Steiner also differentiated the concept from the western tradition, presenting a unique concept of the principle of repeated earthly lives that takes into account the self-concept of modern human beings.

The recognition of reincarnation and karma results in a broader perspective on people with disabilities, including the unconditional recognition of the right

Illustration by Cédric Zéba: “Luckily, the human being has friends.”

You can only offer us options.

We are free to choose whichever we want.

Nelli Riesen

to exist and the meaningfulness of the biography of every human being.

It leads to an attitude that grants every human being—regardless of the severity of her or his disability—the right to a successful life, and endeavors to support her or him in all possible ways.

This attitude is based on three things:

- The recognition that each person had experiences in earlier earthly lives that contribute to key circumstances in this present life;
- The certainty that destiny is not random; and
- The conviction that experiences in this life will affect future incarnations.

A primary focus on the individual as opposed to the disability

For this reason, when interacting with and meeting people with special needs, the primary focus is on the intact core of their being, their individuality, and not on their disability or limitation. This individual inner core eludes our immediate perception, which is why approaching the essence of another human being, his or her individuality, is a very challenging process. The French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas expressed this as follows: “To encounter a human being is to be kept awake by a riddle.” All human beings are riddles, both to themselves and to others. This gives rise to the questions of which path, which abilities and attitudes can be helpful to us in solving a riddle.

The path to solving the riddle lies in dialogue

In the Curative Education Course, Rudolf Steiner urges professionals to shape their relationships with

people with special needs such that they don’t determine those people’s paths for them, with the attitude “I know what’s good for you.” He points out that each child represents a new challenge, a new riddle. “And the only way [you] can succeed in finding what [you] must do in the individual case is to let [yourself] be guided by the being in the child. It is not easy, but it is the only real way to work.” (Steiner 1998, pp. 87). The path to solving the riddle is through dialogue. The child or adult with special needs “knows” the solution, and the professional is tasked with shaping the meeting in such a way that it can be revealed. The path is uncomfortable, because in forming relationships with other people, we are also always confronted with our own weaknesses and limitations.

In addition to these fundamental ideas, there are also further ideas in the field of anthroposophically oriented study of the human being that are very important in the context of supporting, accompanying and caring for people with disabilities.

The Threefold Human Being

As early as the 18th century, the Swiss educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827) described the human being as a trinity of head, heart and hand. The German poet and philosopher Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) later took up this threefold structure and presented it in his letters on the “aesthetic education of the human being.”

According to Rudolf Steiner, the threefold nature of the human being is found in different areas in the physical body, the soul and the spirit:

- In the physical body as the nerve–sense system, the rhythmic system, and the metabolic–limb system;
- In the soul as thinking, feeling and will;
- In the spirit as waking, dreaming and sleeping.

Our organism is built of polarities. The head–pole with its manifestation in the nerve–sense system and the metabolic–limb pole are opposing principles of function, which are mediated by the rhythmic system. Nothing takes place in the upper human being (head pole), that is not echoed in the lower human being (metabolic–limb pole), just as all processes in the lower human being are reflected in the upper human being.

The nerve–sense system

The nerve–sense system has its physical basis in the nerve tissue and in the sensory organs connected to it. It allows us to be awake and consciously connected to our environment and ourselves. The nerve–sense system is characterized by alertness and low vitality. According to Rudolf Steiner, thinking and consciousness are based on degradative processes, which allow us to grasp the world through thinking. However, an excess of degradative processes can lead to health problems.

The rhythmic system

In the rhythmic system, we find the processes in the human organism whose rhythmic activity—such as breathing and the circulation of the blood—supplies

the organism with vital substances. These processes work through the physical organism, but also clearly affect our soul sensations – our feeling life. The rhythmic system keeps the balance between the upper and lower systems. Both our breathing and our circulation are also characterized by polar processes – inhalation and exhalation in breathing, and systole and diastole in each heartbeat.

The metabolic–limb system

The metabolic–limb system allows the human organism to both build up and break down substances that we need in order to live. The anabolic or building up processes with their life–supporting functions are in the foreground, but they are not consciously perceived. We are in a state akin to sleep with regard to these processes. At the same time, our limbs enable us to engage with the world – to grasp it and work with it. For this reason, the metabolic–limb system is the foundation of the will.

In order to understand a person, it can be helpful to use the above information. A child that lives intensely in its nerve–sense system and senses behaves very differently from a child whose metabolic–limb system dominates. The first child is hyper–aware, sensitive, and easy to distract, while the other seems closed off and preoccupied with itself. These polar behaviors can be interpreted as abnormal. An understanding of the threefold structure gives us not only an understanding of the meaning of the “abnormal” behavior, but also a therapeutic path for leading the child back toward its center.

Love is important for human beings. Our task is work. We are here to learn something.

Michael Siegenthaler

Fourfoldness and Biography

The complementary perspective in the Curative Education Course of the human being as a fourfold being is also important to understanding disability. The human being has a physical body, in common with the mineral, plant and animal realms. The human body contains minerals itself, and is subject to the laws of physics. It consists of the same materials and forces as the rest of the lifeless world. The laws of the physical world become apparent at death, when only the corpse—the physical body—remains behind and decays.

The etheric body as builder and shaper of the physical body

Throughout our life, the physical body is permeated by the so-called life body, formative forces body or etheric body, which we have in common with the plant and animal kingdoms. “[It] works in a formative way on the substances and forces of the physical body and thus brings about the phenomena of growth, reproduction, and inner movement of vital body fluids. It is therefore the builder and shaper of the physical body, its inhabitant and architect.” (Steiner 1996, pp. 7 et seq.). The physical body is an image of the life body; the etheric body animates the physical body and prevents its death.

The astral body as the “location” of feelings

Human beings also have psychological or soul experiences: We can feel joy, sadness, annoyance or anger, for example, and have to deal with our own desires and drives. Often, strong feelings and desires also become stumbling blocks in our engage-

ment with the world. Steiner calls this active principle of the emotional and soul world the sentient or astral body, which human beings have in common with animals: “It is the vehicle of pain and pleasure, of impulse, craving, passion” (Steiner 1996, p. 8). This can all be summarized with the concept of sentience. Understood in this sense, sentience is not simply a reaction to an external stimulus, but rather an internal process that transforms an external stimulus into an internal experience.

The I makes possible the connection between the spiritual and the physical

Unlike the other kingdoms of nature, human beings have a fourth constituent element – our I. The concept “I” has a very specific meaning – a person can only use it to refer to herself or himself. “No one can use this name to designate another. Every human being can only call themselves ‘I’; the name ‘I’ can never reach my ear as a description of myself. In designating oneself as I, one has to name oneself within oneself. Human beings who can say ‘I’ to themselves are a world unto themselves.” (Steiner 1996, p. 10).

The I communicates to us our consciousness of ourselves. Through our I, human beings have the capacity to connect with both the spiritual and the physical.

The development of the I occurs in stages. Around age two or three, children begin to call themselves “I” – a significant milestone in development and an extremely important step. In the course of childhood and adolescence, further I milestones can be observed in an increasing self-awareness. This development reaches an external conclusion around the age

of 21; only then do human beings have the full capacity to shape their biography within the framework of the options available to them and to consciously approach their inner development.

These four elements are at work in every human being from the beginning of life. The way they interact also determines the specific temperament of each human being. However, the four constituent elements described above free themselves from their protective sheaths at different points in time, similar to the way the body detaches itself from the mother at birth.

In accordance with this image, in the anthroposophic understanding of the human being we speak of several births.

- birth, the physical body is born, becoming free of the mother’s protective bodily sheath and exposed to the forces of its environment.
- Around age 7, the etheric body is freed, an outward sign of which is second dentition. The child no longer needs its etheric forces for building up and forming its organs – they are now available to its soul or psyche and the child is ready for school.
- Around age 14, the astral body is freed, and adolescents develop a rich, often charged inner life, which therefore also often challenges their environment. This manifests in sexual maturity; Rudolf Steiner coined the term “earth maturity.” Adolescents now connect intensively with everything earthly, either accepting it or rejecting it and developing their own capacity for judgment.

- Later, around age 21, the I becomes free. It frees itself from its bondage to the physical body, the life processes and soul sensibilities, and creates the preconditions for free and individual development.

Developmental steps in seven-year periods

Rudolf Steiner understands human development as a process that unfolds in periods of approximately seven years. The steps from one seven-year period to the next are outwardly evident in childhood and adolescence—second dentition around age seven, culmination of puberty or earth maturity around age fourteen. Later, the changes are no longer physically detectable, but are rather of a soul and spiritual nature.

These developmental steps with their different emphases are very important in working with people with special needs. It is of great importance that we address an adult whose intellectual capacity is that of a four-year-old according to his or her real age in regard to her or his soul and spiritual needs.

The Senses

Rudolf Steiner speaks of twelve senses

Understanding the senses is an important part of understanding human beings, and Rudolf Steiner developed teachings on them over the course of many years and presented them in many lectures and writings. Steiner speaks of twelve sense realms that can be divided into three sub-groups. He calls the three sub-groups the lower or basic, middle, and upper senses.

A brief characterization of a few individual topics from the Curative Education Course – not a comprehensive overview

Lower senses

Together, the four lower senses, also called the body or basic senses—sense of touch, sense of life, sense of one’s own movement, and sense of balance—give us perceptions and experiences of our own physicality, our own body. If these senses are well developed and adequately stimulated, they help us to experience feelings of trust, harmony, freedom and inner peace.

Middle senses

The middle senses—smell, taste, warmth and sight—allow us to explore our world, and have a direct influence on our feelings. Therefore, experiences with the middle senses are often connected with feelings of sympathy or antipathy. This is evidenced in everyday expressions, such as “not being able to stand the sight” of someone, finding a remark “distasteful”, describing someone as “coldhearted” or “warmhearted”, or in the childish expression of disapproval, “you stink!”

Upper senses

The upper senses—which Rudolf Steiner also called the cognitive senses—connect us with the world around us and enable us to have relationships with and to understand other people. The sense of hearing does not only convey sounds and tones; it also reveals something of the inner mood of those around us. The sense of speech builds on this, as we identify what we hear as speech, as does the sense of thought, which allows us to understand the content of speech. And finally, the highest human sense, the sense of the I of the other. The upper senses form the basis for perceiving and understanding others as individuals – as independent I-beings.

Developing the senses is of great importance

A healthy development and sufficient sensory stimulation and strengthening are extremely important in childhood, especially in regard to the four so-called basic senses. Sensory training also plays a decisive role in the field of early intervention. The basic senses are important points of reference in diagnosing behavioral abnormalities.

Understanding the senses makes possible important diagnostic insights in working with people with special needs, and is also the foundation for therapeutic approaches and concrete interventions.

Anthroposophically oriented understanding of the human being is very comprehensive and cannot simply be reduced to individual facets. All of the reference points introduced above play important roles in anthroposophically oriented curative education and social therapy, and form the foundation for symptomatology, diagnostics and therapies.

Curative Educational Perspective and Ethical Questions

The anthroposophic view of human beings directly relates to questions of the attitude and training of professionals in curative education and social therapy.

Focus on character

In the Curative Education Course, Rudolf Steiner gave a number of suggestions for self-development, as he saw this as absolutely essential for the practice of this profession. For him, the character of the practitioner was of primary importance. “For you have no idea how unimportant is all that the teacher says or does not say on the surface, and how important what he himself is, as teacher.” (Steiner 1998, p. 45). In this context, self-development is not a requirement or a chore, but is rather about continual improvement of our professional and personal competence in curative education and social therapy work. The question of ethics is directly related to the question of attitude, because helping relationships are always asymmetrical. There is a power imbalance between the person who needs help and support and the person giving it. The question of ethics is therefore one of the central challenges in relationship building, and requires great attention and care. The ethical dimension of curative educational and social therapeutic activity must also always encompass the entire field – from guiding principles to strategies to the structure of daily life.

Relationship as the Foundation of Curative Education Work

With regard to building relationships, Rudolf Steiner formulated a “law, of the working of which we have abundant evidence throughout all education” (Steiner 1998, p. 41) in his Curative Education Course. This law illustrates the only indirectly perceptible effects and influences that play out between an adult and a child. Although Steiner describes this law based on an encounter between an adult and a child, it is also valid between adults.

According to the pedagogical law, the mood or attitude with which we meet other human beings is crucial: Do we show interest, and connect with their concerns? Do we sincerely try to understand them? And are we ready to truly engage in the meeting?

Steiner’s explanations clearly show us how adults can influence a child’s development or an adult’s mood by consciously training our thinking, feeling life and will through self-reflection and inner engagement. This can range from positive influence to negative effects (if lack of interest or rejection characterize the encounter).

In any given encounter, we can perceive that attitude—which plays out in invisible-to-us processes—rather than externals, contributes most to the success or lack of the encounter.

The key points mentioned by Steiner in the Curative Education Course can be paraphrased as follows:

- Recognition of and respect for the other’s individuality
- A sense for authenticity and truth in the encounter: We shape an encounter with people with

I can't go to university, but I know all about what it takes to live life – and it takes a lot.

Nurhak Demir

special needs not only as professionals, but as authentic human beings with all of our strengths and weaknesses. This requires being honest with ourselves and not hiding behind a role.

- A sense of responsibility and inner courage. The asymmetry of the encounter generates a task that we must meet with conscious responsibility and courage. In doing so, we must not misuse the expression “they need to decide for themselves” as an excuse.
- Attention and interest as the foundation for understanding the other person.
- Attentive accompaniment and support. In today's world, where objectivity and verifiability are highly valued, this may seem like an antiquated demand. But if we look back to our own school days, we might remember how one teacher's appreciation was a decisive factor in our own motivation and success in learning.
- Humor and flexibility. Real humor has a healing quality and can help us deal with difficult and challenging life situations. It can be a help in everyday life for everyone concerned. Flexibility is necessary because situations often change quickly in curative education and social therapy. Spontaneity is needed, because holding on to preconceived plans can get in the way of appropriate support.

All of these dimensions, only briefly characterized here, are prerequisites for successful relationship building and should be worked with more deeply where appropriate.

The Concept of Disability and its Societal Dimension

Soul care

Although Rudolf Steiner used terms for people with disabilities in the Curative Education Course that were common at the time and are problematic today, his understanding of disability was fundamentally different from the general understanding in his time. This can be seen not only in the above-mentioned term “in need of soul care” that he coined in the prospectus for the first anthroposophic facility, but also in the anthroposophic references to disability and the approach to diagnostics in regard to children in the Curative Education Course.

For many decades, the term “in need of soul care” was the distinguishing feature and trademark of anthroposophic curative education and social therapy. In recent decades, however, it has come under increasing criticism. It is no longer able to do full justice to the objectives of curative education and social therapy, which are based on self-determination, autonomy, participation and inclusion. Steiner drew attention to the fact that disability has not only individual-intellectual, or physical-psychological dimensions, but also social and societal ones. This is due to the fact that the majority in a society determines what is “normal.” If a society sees it as “normal” for a seven-year-old child to sit quietly in a chair for five hours—even though movement is the defining feature of this age group—a child that doesn't do this in school, for example, is seen as abnormal or disabled, because it is out of the ordinary. This dimension of societal disability was once summarized in an awareness campaign by affected peop-

le and their families: “We are not disabled, we are being disabled” (translator's italics). [“Wir sind nicht, wir werden behindert.”] A thought-provoking statement!

The societal dimension of disability

In the Curative Education Course, Steiner expressed it as follows: “[People who abide by ordinary conventions] have their ideas of what is to be considered rational or intelligent, and then everything that is not an expression of a ‘normal’ life of soul (as they understand it) is for them an abnormality.” (Steiner 1998, p. 19). Although Steiner only refers to soul life here, it is clear that, over 90 years ago, he was already pointing to the significance of the social, societal and normative context for people with special needs. This societal dimension of disability has become more prominent in recent years. The preamble to the United Nations' “Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” (UNCRPD), states that our understanding of disability is constantly evolving and “that disability arises from the interaction between people with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that prevent them from participating fully, effectively and equally in society.”

Professional Collaboration

Interdisciplinary collaboration

In the last lecture of the Curative Education Course, Rudolf Steiner described curative education as a synthesis of anthroposophically extended medicine, pedagogy, and art. This was not because he didn't want to acknowledge its independence, but rather because of the awareness that a child or adult

can only be properly supported and accompanied through the interaction of these different fields.

In anthroposophic understanding, the role and task of medicine goes beyond supporting a person through health problems. In addition to mainstream medical treatment of physical and psychological illnesses, it also includes constitutional treatment with homeopathic medicines, and collaboration between physician and therapists to determine therapies and verify their effectiveness. Pedagogy includes both educational and social support of children and adolescents with special needs. In the case of adults, pedagogy is replaced with inclusive community building and social support: adult-oriented guidance and support based on self-determination, autonomy, participation and inclusion, supplemented by the opportunity to engage in meaningful work.

In this context, art has a threefold significance:

- As the active form of artistic activity in speech formation, music, painting, eurythmy, sculpture and movement;
- As artistic therapies like music therapy, art therapy, speech therapy, and Eurythmy Therapy;
- As the opportunity for seemingly passive reception through listening or viewing.

The interdisciplinary approach of anthroposophic curative education and social therapy has been implemented in many facilities and communities for over 90 years. In the process, tensions can sometimes arise between the various professional groups, but focusing together on the people who need help and support is always helpful.

I could only have contact with people who met me on a deeper level. I realize now that there are a lot of superficial people. I have a very hard time with that – I don't feel taken seriously by these people.

Marianne Stärkle

Anthroposophically oriented work in the education, support and accompaniment of people with special needs can now be found in over 50 countries and on all inhabited continents. The regional and national networks and their associations work together as an international movement through the Anthroposophic Council for Inclusive Social Development.

The organizations and initiatives in this movement cover a spectrum of services and types of work, ranging from early intervention to schools, vocational training programs, therapies, various forms of support in daily and work life, assisted and accompanied living situations, inclusive and intergenerational life-sharing communities, and elder care. There is also an international network of education, training and continuing education opportunities for people in this field, including university-level bachelor's and master's degree programs as well as research centers with doctoral programs.

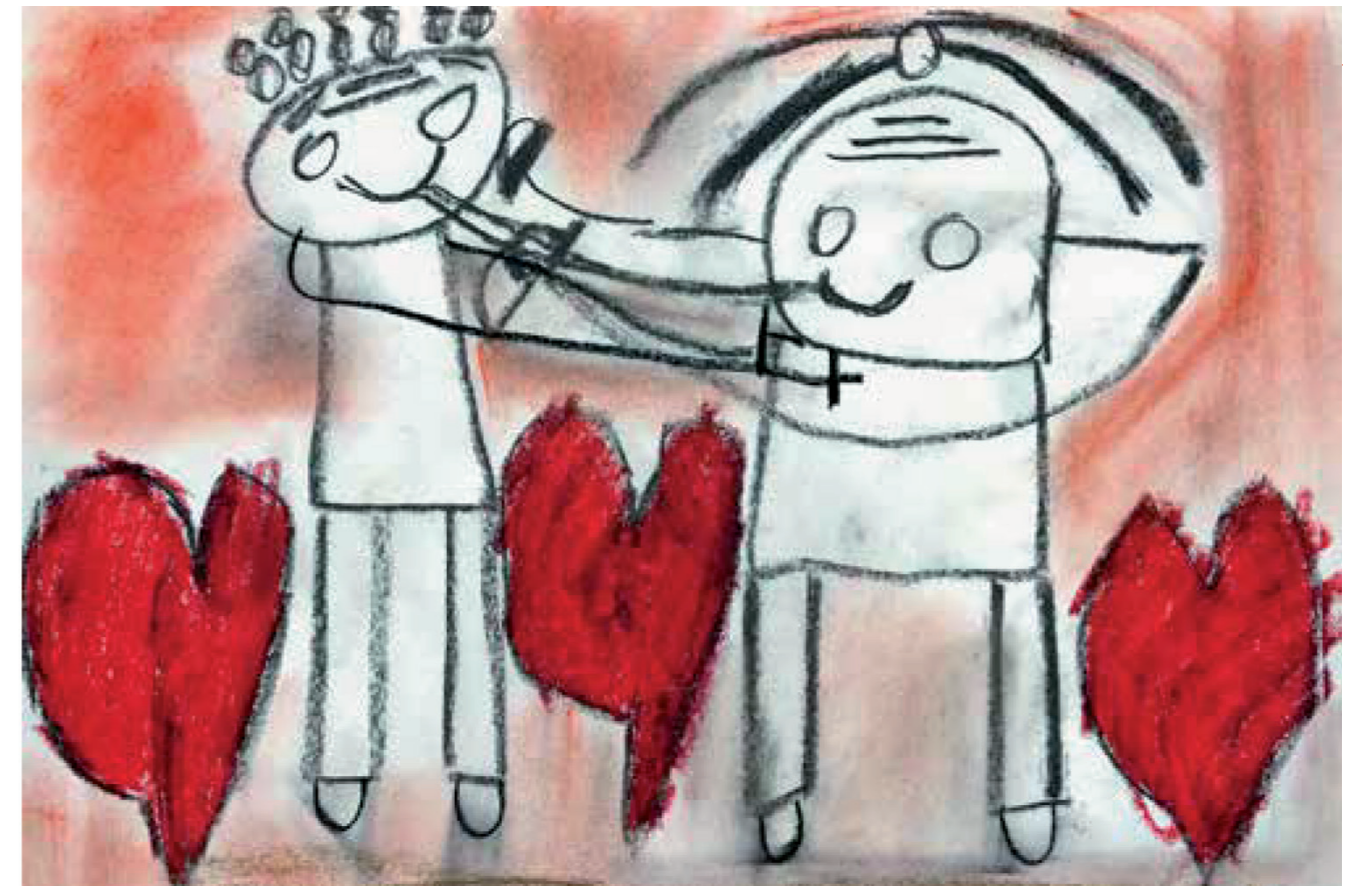
Cultural Diversity and Common Guiding Principles

The institutions and organizations in the worldwide movement for anthroposophic curative education, social therapy and related fields of work are an integral part of their respective social and cultural contexts. Alongside the resulting diversity, they are united by common guiding principles. The Swiss association (vahts), for example, summarizes these fundamentals of anthroposophic curative education and social therapy as follows:

The central guiding principles of anthroposophic curative education and social therapy are

- The holistic understanding that human beings consist of body, soul and spirit
- Value and respect for the uniqueness of each human being and recognition of their right to bodily, psychological and spiritual integrity
- Orientation toward the resources inherent in each human being and support for each person's individual biographical development
- Relationships based on dialogue, and enabling the greatest possible independence and self-determination
- Recognizing people with disabilities as equal partners in social, cultural and spiritual life, as well as the promotion of integration and participation.

These guiding principles must of course be constantly adapted in practice and made concrete in a way that makes sense for the people concerned, their cultural and social setting, and their respective society. The anthroposophic understanding of the



human being offers a foundation for implementing these principles when working with people with special needs, their families, and our colleagues from other special education approaches.

Networking and Continuing Education

Networking and Collaboration

Representatives of anthroposophic curative education and social therapy are tasked with implementing Rudolf Steiner's recommendations and insights in such a way that they not only actively exist, but also find recognition in current professional discourse. Besides professional and social networking, this is one of the central aims of the Council, as well as of the national and regional associations. For example, there are various national and international professional committees that are in communication with each other and with colleagues whose work is not based on an anthroposophic understanding of the human being. Great importance is placed on offering professional and in-depth continuing education. In the International Training Circle, training centers have been actively working together for over twenty

years on the continuous development of the methodology, didactics and content of professional training courses. Due to its innovative orientation, this collaborative work has been repeatedly supported by the European Union, among others.

Openness and a Willingness to Engage in Dialogue as the Path to the Future

Contemporary anthroposophic curative education and social therapy are characterized by openness and interaction, which are actively cultivated and are enriching for all involved.

In many establishments, the way daily life for people with special needs has been traditionally structured is rightly being questioned; however, this creates a need for an openness to dialogue, awareness and attention. The further development of anthroposophic curative education and social therapy is only possible through constant, active and in-depth examination of the foundational ideas and a sensitivity and awareness to the needs and questions of the time.

Drawing by Corinne Mosimann

Conclusion

Engagement with the anthroposophic understanding of the human being cannot conclusively answer the questions listed at the beginning of this pamphlet. But deep work with these questions can greatly contribute to a better understanding of people with disabilities and their needs, and to mutually seeking out—always open and provisional—possible individual answers.

Curative education and social therapy require a process of dialogue in its original sense. The term “dialogue” comes from Ancient Greek and is composed of two roots: “dia”, which means “through”, and “logos”, which can be translated as “spirit.” So the key question is: Can we meet a person with special needs in such a way that their spirit, their essence, or their individuality shines through and can reveal itself?

Focus on individuality

We must never reduce a person to their outward appearance, their disability, or their limitations. What is important is what is hidden behind the outward appearance, disability or limitation – namely, their individuality, their true being. Steiner’s call in the

Curative Education Course to “let the true being lead” is fundamental for the professional field of curative education and social therapy and can only be realized with a dialogic approach. When a famous pianist plays a concert, she depends on a well-tuned instrument that makes her skill and intentions audible. If the instrument is not in tune or if keys are missing, discords and disharmonies will result. It would not occur to anyone to blame the pianist for this.

A person with special needs is in exactly this same situation: her instrument cannot adequately realize her intentions, so she appears to us to be handicapped and limited. But as fellow human beings, we must not stop at this judgment. Rather, we must pay attention to the individual that is hidden behind it. Only then can curative education do justice to the original meaning of the words.



Drawing by Nathalie Brunner

“Anthroposophic curative education and social therapy thus operate in a wide range between adherence to traditional ways of understanding, language rules and attitudes and the constantly necessary redefinition of their objectives and further development of their ways of working. Today—more than in the past—they are in a lively process of interaction with broader socio-political and professional processes, in which they seek to actively participate in a different way than they did until the 1960s.”

Marianne Stärkle

Cited literature

Steiner, Rudolf (1973): *Anthroposophical Leading Thoughts*, GA 26, Rudolf Steiner Press, London.
Steiner, Rudolf (1994a): *How to Know Higher Worlds*, Anthroposophic Press, Hudson.
Steiner, Rudolf (1994b): *Theosophy*, GA 9, Anthroposophic Press, Hudson.
Steiner, Rudolf (1996): *The Education of the Child*, Anthroposophic Press, Hudson.
Steiner, Rudolf (1998): *Education for Special Needs*, GA 317, Rudolf Steiner Press, London.

Quotations and illustrations

Stiftung Humanus-Haus (2010): *Der Mensch hat eine Unterschrift. Bilder und Texte von Menschen mit Behinderungen*, Rubigen.
Stärkle, Marianne / Riesen, Nelli (2005): *Conversations with Assisted Communication [Gespräche mit gestützter Kommunikation]*. Unpublished private printing, Oberhofen / Rubigen (in the author's archive).

Further reading:

Edmunds, Frances (2005): *An Introduction to Anthroposophy*, Rudolf Steiner Press, London.
Hogenboom, Marga & Woodward, Bob (2013): *Autism: A Holistic Approach*, Floris Books, Edinburgh.
Jackson, Robin (2006): *Holistic Special Education*, Floris Books, Edinburgh.
Jackson, Robin (2011): *Discovering Camphill*, Floris Books, Edinburgh.
Jackson, Robin & Lyons, Maria (2016): *Community Care and Inclusion for People With an Intellectual Disability*, Floris Books, Edinburgh.
König, Karl (2001): *The First Three Years of the Child*, Floris Books, Edinburgh.
König, Karl (2009): *The Child with Special Needs*, Floris Books, Edinburgh.
McKanan, Dan (2020): *Camphill and the Future*, University of California Press, California (open source copy available at <https://www.luminosoa.org/site/books/m/10.1525/luminos.92/>)
Prasanna, Lakshmi & Kokinos, Michael (2018): *Autism: Meet Me Who I Am*, SteinerBooks, Hudson.

Website

Anthroposophic Council for Inclusive Social Development: <https://inclusivesocial.org>

Many articles on anthroposophic curative education and social therapy can also be found in the journal "Anthroposophic Perspectives in Inclusive Social Development". Publisher: Verlag des Anthroposophic Council for Inclusive Social Development, Dornach. See <https://inclusivesocial.org/en/journal-perspectives>

Publisher

Verlag des Anthroposophic Council
for Inclusive Social Development
Ruchti-Weg 9
4143 Dornach
Switzerland
+41 61 701 84 85
info@inclusivesocial.org
www.inclusivesocial.org

This publication is based on the
German-language pamphlet:
Fischer, A. (2018). *Anthroposophische
Heilpädagogik und Sozialtherapie:
Eine Einführung*. (2nd edition).
Rubigen, Switzerland: vahs.

It is published in cooperation and
with the kind support of
vahs – Verband für anthroposophische
Heilpädagogik und Sozialtherapie Schweiz
www.vahs.ch

Translation from German by Tascha Babitch

ISBN: 978-3-9525371-3-8



**Andreas Fischer ·
Rehetobel, Switzerland**

Andreas Fischer was born in 1954, and is married with four children. He completed studies as a curative educator, an elementary school teacher, and a supervisor. From 1980–2001, he was the school director

and a teacher at a small residential special school in eastern Switzerland. From 1995–2006, he was coordinating director at the Swiss Association for Curative Education and Social Therapy (vahs). Until 2005, he was an auditor of “Wege zur Qualität” and a member of the certification body “Confidentia.” He has been active in training and continuing education since 1995. From the summer of 2006 till the summer of 2017, he was the Director of the Anthroposophic College for Curative Education (HFHS) in Dornach, Switzerland. In 2011, he received his doctorate at the University of Siegen in Germany.

