

## The history of WOW-Day

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From the very beginning, Waldorf school was meant to be influential in the local community. It was almost 100 years ago that the first Waldorf school opened its doors. At a time when the world was still smaller (or bigger if you want) and the village or the community you lived in was the whole world so to speak. The first schools influenced of course the families connected to them, but also the local environment through plays, markets and fundraising events. Perhaps some pedagogically interested people also found some new ideas for teaching. Then from the 70's onwards a new generation developed. Here in Norway we had a boom from 1973 to 1995. By the beginning of the new century we suddenly found ourselves as part of a network of almost 1000 schools around the world, representing all continents and cultures. It was a completely different picture from 50 years before.

### Globalisation

Already from the middle of the 80's we could start feeling the globalisation that really came upon us in the 90's. When Gorbachev came to power in 1985 and started to meet with the President of the United States to discuss new ideas, when Bob Geldof managed to organise the Live Aid concert, which aired live on both sides of the Atlantic and reached 2 billion people in 1984, when Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie wrote "We are the World", recorded it with 45 of the most famous musicians in the United States, sold more than 20 million copies and raised more than \$63 million for humanitarian aid in Africa, it maybe dawned upon some people that we were approaching a new era. The first Waldorf schools in Eastern Europe were founded in the beginning of the 90's and a couple of years later there was a number of schools in need of help, specifically pedagogical, financial and organisational help. What could the "old" schools in Europe do to help their friends in other countries? Waldorf education attracted interest in countries with no tradition for independent initiatives. At the same time initiatives started to develop in other parts of the world, in Africa and South-America and later on in Asia. This happened not only in the richer parts of the big cities, but also in villages, in favellas, in townships, which created a new challenge. How could we help them to have an education? For some of us this became a pressing question. What could we do?

### To make a global social difference

The old tradition of influencing the community had suddenly become a much larger issue with an enormous challenge to all of us. I felt we had to do something. What about creating a solidarity campaign for all students in Europe? Such a step could create a lot of new awareness and raise some money for some of these poor areas. Since the 60's, we already had Operasjon Dagsverk (operation give one day) in the Scandinavian state schools and I thought Waldorf schools should also contribute in this way. The idea was introduced at the European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education in 1993 and everybody agreed. With the help of contacts that the Friends of Waldorf Education had built up over years, we were able to find some good projects. Helmut Loebell from Austria/Colombia provided the first project. As he had helped to build up the first SOS Children's Village in Colombia and lived in the country for some time, he suggested one project in Sierra Morena in Bogota, the capital of the country. This became our first project and has stayed with us ever since. WOW-Day was born. And in 1994 Waldorf One World had its small beginning.

### WOW-Day: fundraising and awareness

WOW-Day can be implemented in many different ways. Sometimes only one class is organising a lottery or working for one day and donating money to a donation pool, sometimes there are two or more classes organising an event together to raise money for one special project and sometimes it is the whole upper school that works for one day. In Norway some schools have a tradition to organise a so called international week or international days to raise awareness for the country or the region of the supported project and to follow its development for many years. In this way students connect to the project and exchange news at other times

during the year as well. In my school, the Steiner School in Vestfold in the south of Norway, we have had some fantastic international days over the years and I will tell you about the ones in autumn 2010.

### Planning the international days

The international days were going to take place in the third week of October. From the beginning of the school year we chose the members of the organising committee with two representatives from each of the four upper classes. Together with me as the teacher representative we met once a week to discuss organisational matters. First, we chose the project that we wanted to support in that particular year. As we had supported a project in Sierra Leone and India in the previous two years and we knew that grades 6-9 would support a project in Colombia, we chose the Educare Centre in Cape Town. We knew a Norwegian woman, Eldbjørg Paulsen, who went to Cape Town for some weeks every year and we hoped she would give a lecture. We also looked at the dates and decided we wanted the international week to begin on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> after the main lesson and continue on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> before we would have a working day on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup>. We had to ask the other upper school teachers for permission, so we wrote a letter. I presented it to the teachers and explained why we needed two days. After some discussion the teachers agreed to give us those two days. Then we could start creating the program. It turned out that Eldbjørg was not available, so we had to find a new way of presenting the township in Cape Town. We had heard about two African boys from Globe Africa who were touring schools with African music, songs and dance, and we contacted them. It turned out that one of them, Kabelo Diale, was in Norway and ready to come to our school to do a workshop on the gumboot dance. Then we started to finalize the program for the two days. We wanted to start with a small lecture about South-Africa and the project in Cape Town. Kabelo was ready to talk about his country and I said I would talk about the project. Then we were going to have different group workshops and decided on painting, designing posters on computers, writing, juggling, cooking and dancing. Everybody in the organising committee had a specific task to fulfil and after a few days we were ready. We decided to see the film "Invictus", which tells the story of how Nelson Mandela helped the rugby team to win the World Championship 1995 in South-Africa. We also asked a former student who had done a project on Nelson Mandela and *ubuntu*, to give a speech about this topic. Now we had a program.

### The International Days

On 19<sup>th</sup> October we were all very excited. After the main lesson all students and some teachers gathered in the hall. Kabelo started by singing the national anthem of South Africa. His voice was beautiful and we were all amazed from the very beginning. He talked about himself, about where he grew up, about apartheid and the new times for his country. Everybody listened attentively. Subsequently, I talked about the project in the township of Cape Town and we were ready to go to the group workshops. For one hour we worked in groups. The painting group created large drawings of African children. The juggling group, led by a class 12 student, was practicing a small performance that they would present to us on the next day. The design group was also led by class 12 students and worked in the computer room. Their task was to create posters for the bazaar on Thursday. The cooking group was in the kitchen cooking for all of us. The largest group, however, was the dancing group of Kabelo who was visibly having fun from the very beginning. They learned about the gumboot dance in the mines of South Africa and were dancing and sweating. At 12 o'clock it was time for an exotic lunch and the cooking group served all of us while creating a wonderful atmosphere. After lunch the groups kept on working and we ended the day with everybody in the hall looking back at what we had achieved. On day two we continued with group work and before lunch we all watched the movie "Invictus", which touched all of us deeply. Our former student gave a great presentation on the *ubuntu* philosophy and talked about her visit to the kindergartens in the township. We had a final session of group work and then during the last hour all groups presented what they had prepared. We also invited classes 7 and 8 to the show. The beautiful drawings of faces of African children were hanging on the walls, along with the posters. Their design featured pictures and maps of South-Africa, citations and poetry that were arranged and designed in such a way that few of us grownups

would have managed. The cooking group talked about their work in the kitchen. The juggling group stepped forward and showed us what they had learnt. And then it all ended with a great performance of the dancing group coming up the stairs singing and shouting. What they showed us was a small miracle! In the end we were all invited on to the stage to dance with Kabelo. There was so much energy in the room so much enthusiasm that we were all convinced we would do great work the next day. And we did. Everybody worked one day and donated the earned salary to the project in Cape Town. Some of us organised a small bazaar event on the town square, together with students from class 5 and some students from the upper classes. We collected 49.000 NOK (about € 6000), which was the main aim of the week. Moreover, we all left with a piece of South Africa in our hearts. The international days were a great success, not least for the reason that we gained a wonderful friend in Kabelo. Can you wish for more? Some students remarked: "This was the best international week ever." I heard the same words the year before, so I was very happy.

### **Epilogue**

We have gone from being a small initiative of a few schools in Europe, which wanted to give a new cultural and social impulse to the local community, to being a global movement with schools all over the world. At the same time the world has become one. We now listen to the same music, dress in the same clothes, watch the same movies and TV channels and communicate through social networks. We, teachers, students and parents of the Waldorf schools have to participate in this "One World". WOW-day is one way of doing this. We can make a difference! We know that we are just a small part of this world, but we also know that what happens in one part of the world can affect us as well. When we look into the world, as we do every morning, we can understand what Michael Jackson meant when he said: "You're just another part of me". (30.12.2010)