



Continuing Education for Trainers

Developing an International Peer to Peer Process

A Strategic Partnership for Exchange of Good Practice (2020-2023)

Methodical-Didactic Lab I: Being Touched and Being in Touch (April 28-30, 2021)

Summary of Participants' Responses to the Pre-Conference Questionnaire

Introduction

Prior to the first of three Methodical-Didactic Labs conducted as part of the Strategic Partnership 'Continuing Education for Trainers – Developing an International Peer-to-Peer Process' (Peer2Peer-CET), participants were asked to respond to reflect on their practice as teachers and mentors in professional education in anthroposophic curative education, social therapy and related fields. The participants included experienced faculty members, as well as new faculty and mentors from a variety of different professional education settings, from formal training to informal professional development in practice contexts.

Participants were asked to respond to two questions:

- Reflect on the different methodical-didactic approaches discussed in our conferences in Kassel over the past years, as well as any other approaches that are important to you. Please share one methodical-didactic practice or approach that has particularly touched you.
- Reflect on your methodical-didactic practice as a teacher, instructor, or mentor over the last year: What have you discovered? What has touched you anew? What questions have arisen?

The responses were grouped according to themes. Each thematic cluster of responses was then used as the basis for a summary statement that captures the experiences, ideas, and questions it contained. Occasionally, particularly poignant statements are quoted verbatim. The result is a picture of a shared culture of methodical-didactic practice that has been developed over the course of 25 years of professional exchange in the context of the International Training Circle for Curative Education and Social Therapy.

Supported by

Question 1: Reflect on the different methodical-didactic approaches discussed in our conferences in Kassel over the past years, as well as any other approaches that are important to you. Please share one methodical-didactic practice or approach that has particularly touched you.

Structured, question-led group work and dialogical processes

No other type of methodical-didactic approach was mentioned as frequently as the various forms of structured, interactive, open-ended, collaborative and question-led peer dialogue and group processes.

For many participants, creating and facilitating formats in which learners can work together to exchange experiences, pursue questions, cooperate on tasks and projects, and take shared responsibility for self-initiated processes of inquiry and discovery, are at the heart of teaching and learning. Experiences of encounter, resonance, interdependence, and responsibility for each other generate the inner qualities that are cultivated through this way of working. Some participants are exploring how to include people with support needs in these learning processes, as co-learners and as instructors.

Participants referenced a variety of specific ways of working in interactive, dialogical, and relationship-based ways, and there appears to be rich experience and expertise in this area within our network. This includes a beginning exploration by some of how to generate dialogue, encounter, resonance, warmth, and inclusive teaching and learning in online and blended formats, which still reach the inner core of the human being.

The Trinal Method – Theory, Art, Practice

While only a handful of participants named the Trinal Method as such, references abound to its three interweaving aspects – with special emphasis on the key role of artistic processes. One participant described the goal of this approach as ‘connecting intuition with method’.

The methodical-didactic role of artistic processes is highlighted in relation to various aspects of the learning process:

- Accessing and deepening (anthroposophical and other) concepts through the arts
- Imaginative-artistic ways of studying the human being
- Accessing and processing experiences through the arts
- Personal development through art
- Developing action competence through art
- Linking knowledge and skill through artistic process

Several participants describe practical experience and the reflection on practice as the entry point into the learning process. In this experiential approach, doing comes first, followed by reflection and dialogue, which opens the door to insight and understanding.

In terms of conceptual work, participants reference the Curative Education Course and Balance in Teaching and highlight the meditative deepening of insights into the human being as the main goal of the work with spiritual scientific texts. This includes the use of

contemplative practices and the work with the 'path through the night'. Dialogical approaches to text study can also support this.

One participant saw an expanded relevance of the Trinal Method as a method that is applicable not only to individual learning, but also to organizational and societal learning processes.

Self-development and Biography

Another theme to complement the Trinal Method and the emphasis on group and dialogue processes appears as a thread of self-observation, self-reflection, and self-development. This work includes methods of biography work and the anchoring of the individual learning path in biographical impulses. Some participants referenced the concept of the Inner Team as a helpful tool. The need to be aware of the boundary between self-development and biographical work in the context of a learning process and the possible cross-over into therapeutic territory was also highlighted – with an open question as to whether this is always inappropriate, or whether there might be a need to find appropriate ways of including a 'therapeutic' element in the learning process, given the prevalent experience of alienation in our time.

Phenomenological methods

Goethean methods of observation, the practice of phenomenological approaches and nature observation are mentioned as tools for schooling perception and understanding.

Some notable individual themes and approaches

Some participants mentioned specific methods, approaches, and themes, which they worked with and felt touched by. These include (in no particular order):

- The Emergent Learning framework as a way of naming one's own experience and accompanying the learner through the stages of the process
- The Playful Approach (Iris Johansson & Per Albom) which foster personality development and intuitive pedagogy
- Roleplay as a didactic method
- The Outcomes that Matter Evaluation (Fulcher & Garfat) and its Circles of Gratitude model, linked with Steiner's concepts of Gratitude, Compassion, and Responsibility
- The Seven Life Processes and Destiny Learning (van Houten)
- The Basic Forms of Anxiety (Riemann)
- Working with the experience of homelessness
- The contextualization of anthroposophic concepts in contemporary scientific, social and cultural challenges
- The Pedagogical Law (Steiner)

Question 2: Reflect on your methodical-didactic practice as a teacher, instructor, or mentor over the last year: What have you discovered? What has touched you anew? What questions have arisen?

Pandemic and Remote Teaching

This was (unsurprisingly) by far the most prevalent theme in participants' responses. The experiences, reflections and questions shared speak of a deep sense of loss, frustration and sadness, a lot of creativity in the attempts to figure out what is possible and how to make the best of the situation, and strong moments of learning and sometimes surprising and unexpected discoveries that lead to new questions and even a sense of new possibilities for the future.

The loss of in person teaching and learning possibilities created challenges on many levels. Participants mentioned that in some cases interactions between teachers and students became more limited and even difficult. Students and teachers lost motivation as they struggled to adapt to the new circumstances and modalities. It was not easy to carry over the principles of the Trinal Method, the integration of theory, art, and practice, into the new format, and it was particularly hard to find ways to do justice to the important role of artistic practice in the learning process. Instructors working in some artistic modalities (e.g., some eurythmy, movement, and speech formation instructors) found it almost impossible to continue their work in a meaningful way. At the same time, the importance of this way of working rose to heightened awareness.

These challenges resonate in the questions that participants formulated:

- How can we be effective in an online format?
- How can we shape, care for, and nurture the relationships and cohesion among faculty and students in this situation?
- How can we generate warmth and create a climate for learning that brings us together in a way that transcends the screen?
- To what extent does the ability to do this depend on the 'memory' of previous in person meetings with the people involved? And how does that differ for a group of people that has not had a chance to build relationships off-line first?
- How do we need to adapt form, content, and process in a way that works for an online format?
- Is it possible, altogether, to maintain the sense of a coherent, unified professional education process?
- Can we develop a method and didactic for online teaching that works? What are the obstacles that stand in the way of this?
- What ways can we develop to include movement and artistic processes in online teaching in a satisfactory way?

Many participants described attempts to make elements of live, in person meetings possible in whatever form and to whatever extent the specific circumstances allowed. Even if some or most of the teaching takes place online, there was a sense among many participants that any degree to which an element of in person meeting can be woven into the process helps sustain the quality of human engagement that carries that joint learning process.

Some participants described how this was done by creating small groups, whose circumstances and proximity allowed them to gather, who came together in person on a regular basis, either to join the online sessions as groups from different locations, or to work offline in person according to a plan and instructions provided by faculty, in between online sessions. In some cases, this led to an experience of a greater sense of initiative, responsibility, and commitment on the part of the students, who had to self-organize and take ownership of a greater part of the process without being directly accompanied by an instructor.

Other ways of supporting this process of small groups and individuals working more independently included providing more online mentoring sessions to individual students or to groups of 2 or three students, in which instructors could listen to questions and concerns and tailor their guidance to the specific needs of individuals. Clear tasks and questions to guide students' preparation for online group sessions, supported by access to materials, exercises, streamed or recorded lectures, and other instructions, were seen as essential to make sure that the time spent together online is used in the most valuable way possible.

In one training center, the classes were divided, so that both halves of a class could alternately participate in person, while the other group worked in an independent study format at home. This model led to interesting experiences, especially a sense of a greater independent activation of the students, as they worked within this rhythm of taught small group classes and private study, but it was ultimately not possible to keep up this format for long enough to see how this dynamic would develop over time.

Some programs that moved to pure online teaching also experienced this shift of emphasis from content teaching to mentoring process: The amount of content presented had to be reduced in favor of more time and space to meet, check in, and support student's more independent study.

One participant's reflections capture an aspect of this dynamic in an exemplary way:

This year has been a challenge, having to learn to teach through the technology of Zoom. Very soon I realized that the students had to take on more of an active role. In a course on the development of consciousness, they were tasked with reading and then actively telling the ancient epics, with screen sharing of art that they either found or created themselves. By asking them to immerse themselves actively into the old stories, I then could engage their imaginative capacities and see if we could link those with our own biographical memories. They could remember when they had been in those different states of awareness. I think that the effort that they needed to do this kept them engaged, even though they were alone in their rooms. However, I also had personal one-to-one tutorials with each student as they worked on their presentation, helped them find material and gave them tips on the story-telling element. In this time, they needed extra attention, I found.

Those who were able to return to in person teaching after a period of online teaching described a new sense of intensity and heightened awareness and appreciation of the value

of being together in person, and the special quality of being and working together that is possible in the direct, unmediated encounter with each other. One participant describes that this brought more focus and intentionality to in person sessions and created an opening to experiment with new and more innovative approaches.

Despite the overwhelming sense of loss and palpable grief over the limitations imposed by the outer circumstances, and the ambivalence regarding all the accommodations that were necessary to make teaching and learning possible under these circumstances, participants also describe moments of discovery and enthusiasm for future possibilities and new perspectives that have opened and may hold opportunities for new formats and ways of working. This participant's remarks are an example of this sense of learning and opportunity:

I have learned so much. I was able to learn what difference my didactics and methodology need to make when it's a face-to-face course, when the course is purely digital, when I incorporate my e-learning courses, when I teach hybrid. I have tried and tested everything. I was touched by the resonance that is possible in digital teaching and touched by the deep conversations and exchanges we had. This would not have happened under other circumstances and in face-to-face teaching. I was also touched by how much I can reach people with the e-learning courses. I have received very moving feedback. I am so excited about how we will organize our exchange and our conferences and meetings in the future. And: There is no substitute for personal conversations, but they are very much possible through digital media. And: I am thrilled how much we suddenly offer each other, how many wonderful lectures I was able to listen to and how uncomplicated it is for me to simply be added digitally as an expert in a course/seminar, etc.¹

Building a Container for Collaborative Inquiry

Many participants shared reflections that touch on the process of building and holding a container for collaborative inquiry and learning. Methodical aspects of this include:

- Balancing structure, rhythm, and predictability with space to attend to the unexpected
- Giving time to arrive in the learning space and in one's own body
- Checking in and giving space for silence
- Taking time to connect students' personal goals with learning objectives and assessments to stimulate internal motivation
- Fostering peer learning

¹ Ich habe so unfassbar viel gelernt. Ich konnte lernen, welchen Unterschied meine Didaktik und Methodik benötigt, wenn es ein Kurs in Präsenz ist, wenn der Kurs rein digital stattfindet, wenn ich meine e-learning Kurse einbeziehe, wenn ich hybrid unterrichte. Ich habe alles versucht und ausprobiert. Berührt hat mich, welche Resonanz in digitaler Lehre möglich ist und berührt hat mich, welche tiefe Gespräche und welchen Austausch wir hatten. Dies wäre unter anderen Umständen und in Präsenz so nicht erfolgt. Neu berührt hat mich, wie sehr ich Menschen mit den e-learning Kursen erreichen kann. Ich habe sehr bewegende Rückmeldungen erhalten. Ich bin so gespannt, wie wir in Zukunft unseren Austausch und unsere Tagungen und Treffen gestalten werden. Und: Die persönlichen Gespräche sind nicht zu ersetzen, aber sehr wohl möglich durch digitale Medien. Und: Ich bin begeistert, wie viel wir uns plötzlich gegenseitig Angebote machen, wie viele wunderbare Vorträge ich hören konnte und wie unkompliziert ich einfach mal in einem Kurs / einem Seminar, etc. als Expertin digital dazu geschaltet werden kann.

- Designing and facilitating dynamic group processes
- Guiding reflection to connect practice and theory
- Developing research projects that integrate artistic work, phenomenological observation, and individual study and are driven by – and support – students' own questions and personal development process

An inquiry-based learning processes allows students to recognize and use their own experiences as a starting point. It also fosters an attitude of openness and the capacity to form questions. This is not always a given but must be learned. There can also be cultural obstacles that prevent students from questioning the teacher, the content or articulating and sharing their own questions. These can be overcome through guided group processes and practice. Topics that may be considered tabu in some contexts (e.g., sexuality) can present a particular challenge.

Some instructors, also, shared their need to learn how to shift into a question-led, inquiry-based approach to teaching. This is partly a question of developing a toolbox of simple exercises and activities that can be woven into the teaching process and stimulate active participation, questions, and initiative. By and large, though, as also became apparent in the answers to the first question, didactic methods that use dialogue, collaborative inquiry and group processes are familiar and well established in the network, and there appears to be a wealth of experience, competencies, and resources, as well as interest and motivation to research and develop this further.

This participants' remarks sum up many of the themes and questions shared by the group of participants:

My particular question these years is how to guide and inspire students to bring questioning and class conversation to a place in which concepts, or newly perceived realities, become clear through the dialogue, or through the shared artistic activity. This way of learning seems most wished for by modern students. There have been successful moments when the students are fired up, wakefully engaged, and earnestly seeking together. There are also times when the conversation seems to just miss the mark. I would like to hone my skills in conducting these enlivening and thought-provoking exchanges. How to meet the students where they are and to enkindle enthusiasm/thirst for further exploration is a constant goal.

Questions:

- What methods and approaches for the schooling of perception and observation have been successful?
- How do I convey the essence of a concept through an artistic process?
- How can I teach in such a way that students do not only gain knowledge, but that knowledge turns into personal insight, practical experience, and artistic process?
- How can I discover students' questions, so that we can enter an exchange?
- How can I awaken interest and share my knowledge and experience in a way that supports the students' further development?

- Do we need to formulate and fix in writing everything that is learned and experienced? Or when is this helpful, and when is it not necessary or even helpful?
- How do I make sure I get enough feedback from students to know whether they understand what I am trying to convey, whether I am being clear and effective in my teaching, and meeting them where they are?
- How can I make sure everyone is met, when I am working with a mixed group of students coming from very diverse backgrounds, experience and starting points?

Balancing Form and Freedom

Several participants reflected on the balancing act, in teaching adults, between providing direction, structure, guidance and input to the learning process, and stepping back to create the space for students to have their own experience, follow their own questions and determine the course of their own learning path. The latter requires an attitude of non-judgment in which less is more. Teachers can support the individual process by giving impulses, and by accompanying the student, being attentive to the process and recognizing what each person needs at any given moment. The needs of the students then guide the teacher, rather than a fixed curriculum.

However, participants recognized some conditions for this to work, which place responsibilities on the teacher. These include the introduction to the student of the capacities and tools needed for individual agency in a self-directed learning process – including methods of inner work, which students might not come across on their own. On the other hand, it is especially in this area that the other person's freedom needs to be respected most. The guiding question, according to one participant, thus becomes: What is your individual karmic or destiny task (or vocation)? And how can I best accompany you in pursuing this mission?

This approach to teaching as mentorship requires that instructors themselves are on an inner path, and that faculty groups work together and support each other as teams. Teachers, as individuals and as a group, need to embody the same gesture of ongoing individual learning and growth that they want to cultivate in students.

If this goes well, it leads to quality of physical, soul, and spiritual presence that becomes the source of a teaching and learning process that integrates past, present, and future. This allows students and teachers to let go of old and habitual ideas and approaches, and to create new ways of thinking about, relating to and doing things in their field of responsibility.

The past year, as one participant remarked, offered many opportunities to practice this.

Questions:

- How do I help adults generate questions?
- How do I leave the space for the individual process?
- How do I find the right balance between leaving space and directing the process?
- How can I support a living and open-ended dynamic without losing the connection to the theme?

Professional Practice as a Field of Learning

The core purpose and aim of professional education in our field of work is to develop the capacities, in each of us, to support and accompany other human beings living life under the most diverse conditions. Those participants who are closest to that practical social task are the ones whose instructional role is that of mentor within a practical context.

One participant formulates the experience of her role as mentor like this:

I understand and affirm that one teaches through disposition, presence, respect and attitude. I have not given courses or lectures; I only open my work environment and share my experience and love for the task performed.²

A challenge that arises in this context, where the conditions for the development of supportive human relationships stand at the center of the learning process, is to find ways of opening for students an interest in their own inner processes and the ability to pursue a path of self-education. This inner dimension is not easy to access amid practical life, and the focus on social media and the superficial relationships engendered in social networks is experienced as an obstacle, as it draws the attention away from the more subtle inner processes.

Working with social games, on the other hand, offers a practical approach to the development of social competences and provides possibilities for engendering inner flexibility and openness towards that, which is new and unfamiliar.

Practical experiences, for example in the daily work with children, also serve as starting point for processes of reflection and inquiry that can be led systematically towards an imaginative and meditatively deepened understanding of individual human situations.

Questions:

- How do I support young adults who are immersed in the superficial experience of relationships through social media?
- How do I support students in developing an attitude of research in their work?
- How do I bring theoretical knowledge and conceptual understanding into a training that is essentially practical?
- How do I develop approaches and practices to deal with cultural differences around difficult (and possibly tabu) subjects with sensitivity and compassion, while still finding ways to address them as an essential part of the professional field and task (e.g., questions around sexuality)?

Methods of Deepening the Understanding of the Human Being

One participant has developed exercises for students to experience different forms of difficulties and disabilities, as well as a set of dynamic questions that encourage students to reflect on their own lived experience. The 'simulated' experiences of disability, together with aspects of students' lived experience, can then become organs of perception that enhance the capacity to recognize and understand the experience of another person. (These exercises have also been successfully adapted to virtual teaching.)

² Entiendo y confirmo que uno enseña con la disposición, la presencia, respeto y actitud. No he dado cursos ni conferencias, sólo abro mi ámbito de trabajo y comparto mi experiencia y amor a la tarea realizada.

Another participant describes a collaborative, dialogue- and inquiry-based process for connecting students' practical experiences with the images of the human constitution developed in the Curative Education Course:

Our starting point for the work in the course was the practical experiences that the course participants had in their daily work with the children. This joint action-oriented reflection takes place almost exclusively in conversational form in groups. In this way, group members stimulate each other to creative thinking and group work in solidarity. In this first phase of group work, the instructor is initially a learning guide. In the second phase, in which the questions from the groups are brought together, the lecturer places individual images from the curative education course in the context of these questions. He always tries to give vivid pictorial descriptions (verbs) instead of terms / nouns (judgments). In a third phase of joint reflection the participants try to connect the images of the curative education course with their questions and their experiences in working with the children.³

Question:

- How can students transform lived experience in inner work?

Some Specific Methods and Process Models

Participants mentioned several specific methodical frameworks that they have found helpful in teaching.

Processes leading from lived experience to imaginative insight depend on the development of an ability to notice, name, and accept one's own feelings, and thereby acknowledge their role and transform them. One participant referenced the coaching model of the Inner Team (Schulz von Thun) as a self-reflective approach that students work with to build this capacity.

Methods of phenomenological observation and psychological self-observation lay the foundation for a deepening process of Contemplative Inquiry, as described by Arthur Zajonc, which moves between 'focused attention' and 'open awareness'. These processes allow an integrated imaginative understanding to arise and open the possibility of intuitive insight for pedagogical and therapeutic action that is responsive to the deeper (also biographical) needs of an individual or situation.

³ Unser Ausgangspunkt bei der Arbeit im Kurs waren die praktischen Erfahrungen, die die Kursteilnehmer in der täglichen Arbeit mit den Kindern gemacht haben. Diese gemeinsame handlungsorientierte Reflexion findet fast ausschließlich in Gesprächsform in Gruppen statt. So regen sich Gruppenmitglieder gegenseitig zum schöpferischen Denken und zur solidarischen Gruppenarbeit an. In dieser ersten Phase der Gruppenarbeit ist der Dozent zunächst ein Lernbegleiter. In der zweiten Phase, in der die Fragen aus den Gruppen zusammengetragen werden, stellt der Dozent einzelne Bilder des heilpädagogischen Kurses in den Zusammenhang dieser Fragestellungen. Wobei er immer versucht anstelle von Begriffen / Substantiven (Urteilen) lebendige bildhafte Beschreibungen (Verben) zu stellen. In einer dritten Phase der gemeinsamen Reflexion versuchen die Teilnehmer die Bilder des heilpädagogischen Kurses mit ihren Fragen und ihren Erfahrungen in der Arbeit mit den Kindern zu verbinden.

According to one participant, the work with Eurythmy can provide methods to support the integration of personal experience with inner contemplative processes.

Outcomes That Matter (Fulcher & Garfat) is a more formalized process of assessing needs, setting individual goals, and evaluating outcomes with clients that one participant described as being used fruitfully in a training context, and which he connected with the cultivation of gratitude, compassion, responsibility, peace and kindness as inner attitudes and gestures.

In relation to inclusive community building, rather than individual support, another organization is working with the model of Sociopolis (Gullart) as a conceptual framework for understanding the developmental needs of a social organism on the way towards inclusive living, learning, and working environments within the context of its wider community. This concept can be used didactically in training to provide a framework for linking observation and insight to action in this context.

Another participant highlights the power of music as a medium through which support social processes and build social capacities.

Some themes that participants mentioned for further exploration:

- Embodiment
- The relationship between the Curative Education Course and modern research
- Neuropsychological approaches in curative education
- Karmic interconnections

Including Persons with Support Needs

A few participants referred to experiences related to the inclusion of persons with support needs in learning processes. Some described that the new challenges in the practice field that arose from the need to provide supports under the conditions of the pandemic presented unexpected learning opportunities and led to the development of new and creative solutions. This became a practical learning experience, arising organically and unplanned out of the circumstances.

One participant highlighted that this process of learning through the emergent challenges of the practice field – when what has worked so far is suddenly not working anymore – is always present. It was just enhanced and intensified by the pandemic.

On the other hand, there were some experiences with inclusive educational opportunities and specific learning opportunities for persons with support needs that had to move online. This was initially experienced as making things impersonal, but as the variety of available offers expanded, participants discovered formats in which persons with support needs were given voice in ways that were astonishingly effective, and in which those with support needs and those supporting them were able to learn side by side.

One participant also referenced the inclusion of persons with support needs in the development of learning formats. One example is the collaborative development of PowerPoint presentations in plain language.

Further Use and Dissemination

This summary is presented here as working material for the further development of the Strategic Partnership for the Exchange of Good Practice 'Continuing Education for Trainers – Developing an International Peer-to-Peer Process' (Peer2Peer-CET). It will be made available in the 'Results' section on the project website: <https://inclusivesocial.org/en/peer2peer-cet/>.

Project participants are invited to discuss these findings in their professional education centers, with faculty colleagues and with other stakeholders, and in preparation for Methodical-Didactic Lab II (May 5-7, 2022, in Kassel (DE) and online). They will also be used as source material for an upcoming publication in the professional journal Anthroposophic Perspectives in Inclusive Social Development.

Dr. Jan C. Goeschel
Project Manager
j.goeschel@inclusivesocial.org

Version November 3, 2021