

Steiner and Montessori: Integral education within a spiritual world view

Dr. Albert Ferrer^[1]

Abstract:

Among the Western pioneers of integral value-based education, two authors deserve special attention in Europe: Steiner and Montessori. This paper outlines a common underlying background in both of them –Philosophical Idealism and Theosophy-; according to the author, it is this special Idealistic sensitiveness that compels the two renowned educationists to react against the technocratic and utilitarian mainstream school system and suggest new avenues for the pedagogic practice in a holistic, humanistic and even spiritual horizon which overcomes the valueless soulless patterns of modernity. If mainstream schooling is based upon a certain world view –materialistic and mechanistic- Steiner and Montessori’s pedagogic innovation is based upon another world view which is humanistic and spiritual. In spite of different paths in professional terms and different personal contexts, they both put forward the same fundamental pedagogic principles deriving from this common underlying paradigm. From this point of view, the needed caution from mainstream schooling while approaching their philosophy of education should not overlook the contribution that they have made and they still can make to transform the educational systems for better.

Key words.: Philosophy of education, Comparative education, Integral/ holistic education, Education in human values/ value education, Philosophical Idealism, Theosophy, Naturalism, Pragmatism

Article History: Received: 26th December 2017, Revised: 24th January 2018, Accepted: 6th March 2018, Published: 31st March 2018.

I. INTRODUCTION

It is commonly agreed that Steiner and Montessori would be the pioneers of integral or progressive pedagogies in Europe, and Dewey and Kilpatrick in North America. This paper tries to expound the main points of Steiner and Montessori’s pedagogic innovation which strongly makes the case for the humanistic foundation of education –and even spiritual-. At the same time, it shows that there is a common background in Steiner, Montessori and even Dewey –Philosophical Idealism- which induces the three of them to react against the mainstream school system, essentially technocratic and utilitarian like the civilization that has produced it. It is this special Idealistic sensitiveness which propels these major figures of holistic or alternative education to open new avenues in front of the alienating reductionism operated by modern schooling.

The progressive pedagogy of the European pioneers –like that of the North-American precursors- would be deeply akin to the integral value-based philosophy of education of Indian sages such as Vivekananda, Tagore, Aurobindo, Krishnamurti or Sathya Sai Baba. Unfortunately, the Western world has massively ignored the contribution of India, not only in the educational sector but also in general. That is why the renowned scholar, Prof R. Panikkar, always denounced the cultural imperialism of the West while claiming for an intercultural dialogue that has been rare till now.

In fact, the European pioneers of integral education have also been ignored in their own continent for many decades. From a sharp hostility at the beginning towards an initial aperture in the last years, the educational philosophy of Steiner and Montessori is still revolutionary –in the deepest sense- because the mainstream system still goes in the opposite direction –as a reflection of the whole civilization-. There are

more Waldorf and Montessori schools today, and some governments have paid more attention than others to their proposals. But in general terms mainstream schooling is still what both Steiner and Montessori denounced, and their pedagogic innovation is still valid and it is still waiting to be seriously implemented in the whole educational system –not only in a bunch of private Waldorf or Montessori schools-. This may require adaptation, flexibility and prudence; still there is something in both Steiner and Montessori that is important for the whole educational system, not only for a minority of special parents searching for something different for their children.

The most important today would be the deeper message of Steiner and Montessori’s pedagogic and philosophical insights. And this is what we try to elucidate in this paper. Certainly, these renowned educationists have had some influence on Western educational systems, and a number of schools have been created following their inspiration. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that the mainstream school system has not changed in significant terms yet –especially in Europe-; it is still basically academic and utilitarian, and ultimately technocratic; it continues to structure a sharp reductionism in front of the multidimensional nature of humanity and the cosmos. From this point of view, European and Western educational systems are still essentially modern, that is, materialistic and technocratic, not holistic yet -as quantum physics would certainly prefer-. In this horizon we may state something “pour epater les bourgeois”: integral education is quantum whereas mainstream schooling is Newtonian. There is something epistemologically profound in this philosophical provocation. In Steiner’s words:

^[1] Author of the Educational Project “International Education for a New World”, Founder Trustee of the Sri Sathya Yuga Samrajya Charitable Trust (India). Member of the Phi Foundation (Spain), Lecturer Career at the University of Barcelona, Government of Catalonia, Asia House (Government of Spain), Sri Sathya Sai University (India), etc. Email: lokeshkiran@yahoo.com

“Individuals are seldom brought into touch with their own humanity.

Anthroposophy, which is based on a real and comprehensive understanding of the human being, would hear this heartfelt appeal coming from all sides.

When we have genuine knowledge of the human being we see that the human being possesses three clearly distinguished members: physical body, soul and spirit.”¹

In this heartfelt appeal, Europe is probably more reluctant than North America to open the mainstream system to holistic or progressive pedagogies. For this reason, we must say today that the pedagogic innovation of Steiner and Montessori, like that of Dewey and Kilpatrick, is still a source of inspiration in order to transform the mainstream educational systems from technocracy and utilitarianism towards a more holistic, humanistic, ethical and even spiritual vision of education and hence humanity.²

In this perspective, the notion of paradigm is essential to grasp not only all the depth of Steiner and Montessori but more specifically their criticism of mainstream schooling and hence their alternative proposals. As we already mentioned, their philosophical background would be Philosophical Idealism in general and Theosophy or the Theosophical Society in particular –from which Steiner withdrew to create his own frame and organization, Anthroposophy-. This is particularly important to understand their pedagogic innovation.

Let us take experiential learning for instance. In the modern world it would be usually understood in cognitive terms only –see Dewey for instance-; but for Steiner and Montessori, as it was for Socrates and Plato, as it would be for all Theosophists, experiential learning has another deeper dimension beyond the mere cognitive level, which is metaphysical and spiritual: know yourself and you will know the universe and the gods. Here Theosophists such as Steiner or Montessori would be deeply coherent with the Vedic education of India and the Vedantic “gurukula” –community of master and disciples- exemplified by Shankara and his disciples –something deeply akin to Platonism by the way-.

Steiner makes it clear that modern civilization is based upon a materialistic world view deriving from scientism rather than science. In front of this, his world view is spiritual and metaphysical, and he is aware of the gap between the society and himself.³

“The world is permeated by spirit, and true knowledge of the world must be permeated by spirit as well.”⁴

Precisely for this reason academic or governmental reports that do appreciate positive aspects of Waldorf education are still cautious when facing the possible implementation of Waldorf strategies into the mainstream sector. This kind of report manifests the matter of the paradigm or world view, which is not at all the same in Waldorf schools and in mainstream schooling.

For instance, the report of the University of West of England on Waldorf education warns:

“Adoption of Steiner practices in mainstream education has to be approached with caution. Transferring practices

between schools of differing philosophies is neither straightforward nor in all cases appropriate, and may not achieve the expected consequences because they are removed from the supportive school context in which they originate.”⁵

Transferring practices between schools of differing philosophies of education means in depth in philosophical terms transferring practices of differing paradigms or world views.

Steiner and Montessori defended an integral form of education from another paradigm, let us call it metaphysical or Idealistic –form Philosophical Idealism and Theosophy-; certainly not from the materialistic and utilitarian world view prevailing in the modern age. We want to insist on this crucial issue in this paper as we have done in other works through the study of integral philosophies of education both in the West and the East.

II. A MORE DETAILED STUDY OF THE PEDAGOGIC PRACTICE

Montessori, Waldorf and the Socratic Method (the Gurukula of India).

Montessori designed her method basically for young children, since the method itself developed from the observation of small kids. Adolescence and secondary school –from 11 onwards- is another world. And she was aware of it though she left it quite unexplored –probably it was not her task, she already did a lot-. The typical Montessori classroom –as advertised by Montessori Schools- is suitable for kindergarten and the first years of primary school –maybe not so suitable for the end of primary schooling and certainly not for the higher classes-. Apart from being a space for small kids, the typical Montessori classroom is also a women’s domain from which men are visibly absent –which constitutes one of the most dramatic trends of our civilization, the lack of men in education, directly linked to the world crisis of boys’ education, because boys obviously need male teachers as role models-.

Both Piaget and Steiner understood the profound differences between the age-groups and the features of each. From 8 on and especially from 11 on, and even more from 14 on, the deeper meaning of pedagogic principles such as experiential/self-learning or child-centred education must be implemented in ways that are different in practice. But the very image of Montessori Schools in the net seems to ignore the older age-groups from puberty on and their specific pedagogic needs. Steiner was aware of it, and the Waldorf Method designed different pedagogic strategies for the different age-groups while paying attention to the higher classes. Other educationists have also taken into account the necessary pedagogy for adolescents; on the other hand, the Indian Gurukula –like the Socratic dialogue and method- is suitable for adolescents, not for small children. Here the presence of male teachers becomes still more important than in the lower grades, especially for boys; it is anthropologically evident that boys need positive role models of their own gender to grow up in a balanced way.

Still, educational systems should value and integrate both Montessori and Steiner in an open spirit, not in dogmatic terms, which means that they should be open to other contributions too. The ideal synthesis for the future of education could be a combination of the Montessori Method for small children (in an open way) and the Socratic Method (parallel to the Indian Gurukula) for adolescence –while integrating other valuable contributions such as the Waldorf Method, and needless to say, the major philosophers of education of the West together with the great educationists of India, totally ignored by Western cultural imperialism-. When implemented in adolescence, the Montessori Method becomes the Socratic Method, which we can also find in the Indian Gurukula –the Upanishadic dialogues are deeply coherent with the Platonic dialogues-. The pedagogic principles beneath both Montessori and Socrates –and Steiner- are the same: self/ experiential learning, child-centred and holistic education, etc, within a metaphysical/spiritual vision. Not by chance Montessori was a Theosophist –like Steiner- and Socrates is the model for Western Philosophical Idealism. We should keep in mind that Steiner was a Platonist –through Goethe-. This is the underlying philosophical paradigm for integral education.

Last but not least. Both Montessori and Steiner were Theosophists.

Where is the spiritual dimension of the child/ adolescent in most of Montessori Schools and even in some Waldorf Schools? Many Montessori Schools have forgotten adolescents and also male teachers.

They have also forgotten the spiritual dimension of the child, which was certainly present in Montessori's vision –she was a Theosophist like Steiner-. Her philosophy of education incorporates a metaphysical/ mystical dimension: the Child as a Soul.⁶ But many Montessori Schools –and even some Waldorf Schools too- share the materialistic bias of modern civilization and become an integral part of it –they are the cheerful face of this civilization, but still they share the same paradigm in depth-.

The genius of Montessori –or Steiner- has been diluted by their followers, as usual in human history; the human condition has not changed yet.

III. THE MONTESSORI METHOD

From anthropological research, Dr M. Montessori observed children in natural settings such as home, playground, etc. She concluded that children grow and learn from inside out –which not only Piaget but also Philosophical Idealism would endorse, from Socrates to Vivekananda-. There is a natural development of the child, which the educational process must respect.

Children learn of their own accord, and teachers/ parents must nurture this natural process through their loving and prudent guidance. An excess of external inducements –as in mainstream schooling- produces dependence on authority and need of approval.

“The school must permit the free, natural manifestations of the child if in the school scientific pedagogy is to be born.”⁷

- Conventional schools: children are forced to learn and need incentives to learn. If they do not respond they are punished. Punishment and prize are inseparable from forced unnatural effort.
- Montessori schools assume the opposite: children do not need to be forced to learn; they are naturally interested in learning.

Still, we must be aware that M. Montessori did not arrange a legal trademark or brand name –whereas R. Steiner did- which means that anybody can use Montessori's name quite freely –whereas it is legally not possible under the names of “Steiner” or “Waldorf”-. This is the reason why there are around 2000 Waldorf Schools in front of around 20 000 Montessori Schools. On the other hand, there can be very different interpretations of the Montessori Method –which may have pros and cons- in front of the standardization of Waldorf Schools through the educational franchise –which again may have pros and cons-.

➤ ***The three foundations of the Montessori Method:***

- The normalization of the child's natural development
- To cultivate the autonomy of the growing child as a subject
- To educate the whole child –integral education-.

According to M. Montessori, *the classroom environment* must be arranged so that it facilitates interaction and experience through activities –amongst children themselves and between child and teacher-. Children must be able to move around and interact amongst them and with the teacher; pedagogic materials must be easily accessible. The classroom is not run by the teacher unilaterally –as in mainstream schools- but experienced by the children under qualified freedom –freedom for the child to learn by himself or herself under the caring guidance of the adult-. Montessori stressed that the classroom environment is as important as the teacher.

“The novelty lies, perhaps, in my idea for the use of this open-air space, which is to be in direct communication with the schoolroom, so that the children may be free to go and come as they like, throughout the entire day. (...)

The principal modification in the matter of school furnishings is the abolition of desks and benches or stationary chairs.”⁸

Mixing age-groups; elder students as mentors to the younger and leaders. The younger see what the elder are doing and seek for explanations. These are naturally given, which is highly educational for the young ones. At the same time, the elder are happy to teach what they know and this is also educational for them.

Teachers should not face the children frontally all the time but move around the classroom to pay an individual attention to students one by one or in small groups. The teacher must follow the child, instead of the child following the teacher. The teacher is a guide.

Experiential learning. The school must teach basic skills - such as reading, writing, arithmetics, etc-,

but basically through educational activities with a practical dimension that affects life and which is meaningful to children. To learn by doing. Teachers must give to students

constructive and practical tasks to complement mere intellectual learning from outside—given by adults—.

“The pedagogical method of observation has for its base the liberty of the child; and liberty is activity.”⁹

- Bio-sciences teaching becomes a naturalistic inquiry, rising questions from experience with the world.
- Physical sciences might be taught through practical application.

For small kids *play-way methods* are more suitable, since playing constitutes the natural way of learning for the young child. Montessori schools have developed many practical play-way tools and educational toys—which are in fact as old as mankind; two centuries back Froebel already designed educational toys for young children—.

Self-learning. Adults must give a chance to the children to learn on their own. Children must be self-motivated and find their own interests. Teachers must allow students to choose what they want to learn and then guide them. When the child exhibits interest in learning something, he must be guided by the teacher in his own learning process.

According to Montessori, *life is based on choice*. So children must learn to make their own decisions. They must choose and decide in their own educational process. Learning through obedience to external commands is contrary to life. Imagination awakens the natural interest of the child.

“It is true that some pedagogues, led by Rousseau, have given voice to impracticable principles and vague aspirations for the liberty of the child, but the true concept of liberty is practically unknown to educators.”¹⁰

“Discipline must come through liberty. (...)

If discipline is founded upon liberty, the discipline itself must necessarily be active.”¹¹

Together with free choice through individual or group projects, children must be taught self-responsibility through practical tasks while taking care of the educational tools, materials and space.

The pedagogic practice must allow children *to see a bigger picture of knowledge and their own process of learning*, so that they can take ownership of their education, which fosters the child’s natural desire to learn. This can be facilitated when younger students observe what elders are doing by mixing the age-groups.

Mental activities and higher functions are connected to physical movement; it is aberrant to force children—and even more boys— to sit down in front of a blackboard for the whole day—as in mainstream schooling—. The learning process requires *freedom of movement and the natural movement of the child*. We must set the energy of the children free. Freedom in education means freedom for the creative energy, which is the urge of life towards the natural inner development of the individual.

However, there must be *some organization in the school*. Freedom does not mean lack of organization. Freedom requires a structured environment. Organization is necessary for children to work freely.

It is also important that the school/ classroom incorporates *plants and animals*; the contact with Nature is fundamental in education.¹² Children must work in the garden and observe

Nature directly; there can even be plants in the classroom. The contact with animals is also highly educational; it has been proved that many psychological troubles improve through it—see for instance the experiments with equino-therapy—.

While giving freedom to the child and allowing self-learning, the teacher must provide material means, guidance and understanding. *The teacher’s role is indispensable*. Hence, teachers should not apply non-interference when children behave in naughty ways; then, they must stop them and make them realize what they are doing so that they positively transform themselves—which is something very different from negative criticism or coercive punishment—.

In the Montessori classroom *materials are organized into five areas*:¹³

- **Practical life:** this kind of materials and exercises enhance physical coordination, care of self and care of the environment. There are also lessons about polite manners too.
- **Sensorial:** this kind of materials are used in activities and exercises for children to experience the natural world and the physical environment, including shape, colour, etc. Here, Dr Montessori borrowed many ideas from **Dr Itard** and especially **Dr Seguin** with their **Scientific Education**.
- **Mathematics:** this kind of materials show basic concepts like addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, numeration, value, etc. A famous Romantic pedagogue, Froebel, was probably the first educator to design educational play-way materials—known as **Froebel’s gifts**—.
- **Language:** this kind of materials provide experiences through various exercises to develop the basic skills of reading and writing.
- **Cultural subjects:** this kind of materials allow children to learn cultural subjects like geography (map puzzles, globes, etc), history and science (for instance, naming and organizing plants or animals). Music and art are also incorporated in different ways.
- These five domains would be complemented by other activities, namely the various artistic disciplines, performance, gardening, activities into Nature, games and sports, etc.
- For the earlier stages Montessori attached a great importance to sensory training.¹⁴

Still, for Montessori the most important was the state of consciousness, not the pedagogic technique:

“It is my belief that the thing which we should cultivate in our teachers is more the spirit than the mechanical skill of the scientist; that is, the direction of the preparation should be toward the spirit rather than toward the mechanism.”¹⁵

IV. THE WALDORF METHOD

Unlike M. Montessori who focused on young children only, R. Steiner draw a whole map of human development through stages and elucidated the pedagogic principles and tools of education at every stage. Year by year the Waldorf system prepares the growing child for the next step through a

scaffolding of human growth parallel to pedagogic practice carefully designed by Steiner—something that Montessori, in spite of her valuable contribution, did not do-. Through this process, Steiner underlined the interdisciplinary nature of knowledge.

We do appreciate the remarkable contribution of Steiner—like that of Montessori-. Both were decisive to break the rigidity of the dehumanized mainstream school system. But sticking to them and their time without free inquiry and innovation is in fact contrary to their spirit and aperture of mind. All educational systems around the world might get inspired by them—and by other great educationists from both the West and the East- but we should not get blocked at them. Decades have passed and the journey continues. They are the beginning, not the end of the path, which means that their innovation must be reinvented and exploration must go on in an open spirit, not in dogmatic terms. Steiner himself rarely used the term “Waldorf Method”; it was institutionalized by his followers, who recreated a closed system out of his philosophy of education that was still open to ongoing inquiry. As usual in history, the followers have made something that the founder did not do. In fact, Steiner did not pretend to be original and extensively quoted his sources of inspiration, especially the Romantics. His followers only have established the “uniqueness” of the Waldorf Method. For Steiner it was not unique and there was no Waldorf Method even; there was philosophy of education which he explored with an open spirit. In his own words:

“For the true teacher, pedagogy must be something living, something new at each moment. Everything that teachers carry in their souls as memories robs them of their originality.”¹⁶

Steiner’s model of human development through successive age-groups requiring specific pedagogic approaches.

“(…) how important it is that teachers turn their attention in particular toward the drastic changes, or metamorphoses, that occur during a child’s life—for example the change of teeth and puberty.”¹⁷

• **From birth to age 7. Early childhood.**

During this period physical development is key, and children learn through play.

- Hence, the pedagogy must prefer play-way methods and practical activities—with both indoor and outdoor games or activities-.
- Sensory training is also very important because learning occurs basically through the senses.
- Magic is equally crucial since the young child’s world view is essentially magical.

Songs, poems and fairytales must be widely used together with movement games.

- The educational process should incorporate natural rhythm and cultural calendar, seasonal festivals drawn from different traditions and cultures.

• **From 7 to 14. Later childhood and early adolescence.**

Proper academic instruction starts here because the elder child or young adolescent is more intellectually prepared and more aware of the environment and the world. Here imagination and creativity are fundamental, and the elder

child or young adolescent needs a legendary horizon that is inspirational and morally educational.

- Learning is essentially imaginative and artistic. The pedagogy must take special care of emotional education and artistic expression through all the arts. The elementary school curriculum is multi-disciplinary arts-based, including visual arts, drama, dance (eurythmy), vocal and instrumental music and crafts.
- There is little reliance on official textbooks. Instead, the student creates his or her own illustrated summary of coursework in book form.

• **From 14 to 21. Later adolescence.**

In this period the elder adolescent thinks more in depth and develops abstract thinking—which already awakens from 11 on-.

The Waldorf School must prepare elder students for college or professional life.

- Here, the emphasis shifts towards intellectual understanding, ethical ideals and social responsibility.
- In higher secondary education, Waldorf Schools provide specialist teachers for the academic subjects.
- Though the educational process focuses more on the academic subjects, students continue to practise the various artistic disciplines.
- Above all, students are encouraged to develop their own free creative thinking together with moral values and social responsibility.

Steiner’s developmental approach is inseparable from a deep understanding of the human being that cannot overlook the spiritual dimension that simply exists. Waldorf education is but the translation into the pedagogic field of this deeper understanding of humanity—Anthroposophy-. In Steiner’s words:

“A new study of humanity, a new understanding of humanity is necessary. (…)

The second thing that we must develop as we work toward a more humane form of society, is a social attitude of the teachers toward the children already in the school. This is a new love of humanity—an awareness of the interplay of forces between the teacher and pupil.”¹⁸

“I am not surprised that the majority of today’s teachers view their work mechanically. Their understanding of humanity comes from the dead science that has arisen out of the industrial, statist and capitalist life of the past three or four centuries. That science has resulted in a dead art of education (…)”¹⁹

The most important to understand Steiner’s philosophy of education is to keep in mind that the Waldorf School derives from Anthroposophy understood as a “weltanschauung”, a world view that is spiritual and metaphysical, Socratic or Platonist, and also Christian, in front of the materialistic and mechanistic paradigm of the capitalist modern world.

Through this new understanding of humanity that is at the same time very old, Steiner puts forward a developmental approach to education, through which *the Waldorf Method would be based upon the following principles.*

- We must educate the whole child: physically, intellectually, emotionally, morally, socially and spiritually. Holistic/ integral education.
- Not only should we integrate all the dimensions of humanity in the school; also, the educational process should evolve from the whole to the parts through an interdisciplinary spirit in all subjects or activities.
- Students must be taught how to think –freely- rather than what to think.
- Children must learn by themselves on their own pace: self-learning.
- Learning must occur through direct experience and practical activities/ projects: experiential learning.
- Teaching must be linked to reality and the practical aspects of life. Steiner opposed the abuse of mere intellectual, abstract bookish knowledge that becomes overwhelming and finally useless in mainstream schooling.
- Teaching can be delivered in ways that are more creative and artistic, using movement, games, even dance, music or the arts; obviously this may be more suitable for the younger students in simple ways, but even in higher grades the same philosophy can be implemented in more mature terms combining different disciplines in an interdisciplinary pedagogy.
- For the lower grades, even maths can be taught in more visual and artistic ways that use geometrical forms for arithmetic –the holistic approach that integrates different aspects of knowledge and reality-

For the higher grades, maths can be linked not only to science but also to philosophy and obviously to social issues –again the interdisciplinary spirit that can imbibe everything in the educational process-

- Education must be child-centred: teachers must follow children, not children following teachers –as in mainstream schooling-; the teacher is a friend, philosopher and guide.
- Every student must unfold his/ her own potential and vocation.
- Through education the individual must find himself; the Socratic heritage.
- This means that education must be transformative rather than informative.

As it has been emphasized in the Indian educational tradition, love –pedagogic love- lies at the heart of the teaching process in Steiner's vision:

“Now, my dear children, when you have felt your teacher's love all day long up here, then you can go home again and tell your parents about what you have learned, and your parents will be glad (...)”²⁰

- In Waldorf Schools, students and class teacher stay together and grow together through a whole seven years cycle –which might be questioned-
- There is no hurry for academics –in front of the mainstream pressure in terms of academics-. Students may not begin reading until grades 2/ 3 and even 4 –which again may be questioned; not too early, not too late-

- Before learning to read and write, young children become familiar with shapes or forms through drawing and painting that will bring to the alphabet later.

Steiner favoured a slower more integrated approach very different from conventional academic methods in mainstream schooling.

The historical process through which humanity discovered literacy –oral tradition, images, shapes, symbols, alphabet- may ease the way for children to learn to read and write. Children will first listen to a fairy tale, then they will review the story by creating images, later they will explore shapes, forms and symbols, and finally they will progressively learn the letters of the alphabet. Letters may be linked to words/ ideas -B for bear- or objects/ images -T like a tree-. Hence, the growing child will do the experience of the human process itself.²¹

- Subjects are taught for three to four weeks.
- Children are able to learn and explore at their own pace.
- Students are not given standardized tests and marks.

Their progress is measured globally through observation.

Teacher's observation must be discreet not to produce anxiety in the child.

Tests and grades are only introduced in the higher classes as a preparation for college.

- Teachers work with parents to set goals to students.
- In conclusion, Waldorf education wants to unfold human potential in depth with all its capacities, and educate the whole child. The school must stimulate both the intellectual/ rational and intuitive/ artistic side of the student in equal measure –unlike mainstream schooling that hypertrophies the intellect to the detriment of the more intuitive or aesthetic skills-. The holistic nature of Waldorf education embraces the spiritual dimension, dramatically lost in the modern world from Steiner's point of view. In his own words:

“We must develop an art of education that can lead us out of the social chaos into which we have fallen (...)

There is no escaping this chaos unless we find a way to bring spirituality into human souls through education.”²²

V. CONCLUSION

We have tried in these few pages to outline the main points of the pedagogic innovation put forward by Steiner and Montessori in Europe, parallel to that of Dewey and Kilpatrick in North America or the sages of India.

Moreover, we have shown that both Steiner and Montessori share a common cultural background, which is not typically modern -utilitarian and technocratic- but rather humanistic, even spiritual, metaphysical and Idealistic. The foundation of their pedagogic innovation in Philosophical Idealism must be properly grasped and taken into consideration, like their association with the Theosophical Society. Otherwise, we will not be able to adequately comprehend their educational message, and we will not be able to evaluate their historical significance. It is this foundation and association that makes them so deeply akin to the sages of India. And it is this kind of Idealistic sensitiveness which makes all of them critical with

the mainstream school system -valueless, soulless and alienating- and dissatisfied with ordinary schools and their inherent utilitarianism and technocracy, which reduces the multidimensional nature of humanity and reality to mere academic training from a highly rationalistic stand point.

On the other hand, some scholars or professionals of education have overemphasized their social influence or success. Certainly, a number of schools have developed all around the globe following their inspiration, and no doubt, the school system has changed to some extent in Western countries, especially for the primary section –more in North America than in Europe-. Nonetheless, we must realize that Western or modern mainstream schooling –also in Asia- still faces a long process of transformation ahead; it is still technocratic and utilitarian, and it still operates a profound reductionism of the deeper multidimensional nature of humanity and the cosmos. It is still far from the holistic, multidimensional, humanistic, ethical and even spiritual vision of these great educators.

European schooling is probably more rigid and more reluctant to a holistic pedagogy than North American schools. In fact, European universities seem to be pretty rigid compared to the flexibility and dynamism of North American universities. Only Northern countries such as The Netherlands, Scandinavia and Finland have shown more sensitiveness towards this holistic value-based aperture. We can also find some aperture in some social/ cultural sectors of Germany. However, the major part of Europe has followed the extreme utilitarianism of the United Kingdom and the extreme rationalism of France. And the whole of Europe is deeply influenced by an intellectual world view that has obviously promoted merely bookish knowledge instead of experiential learning. That is why Steiner and Montessori ardently defended a more experiential form of education –as it was in the Indian tradition by the way-. They both still stand as a symbol of a long path of transformation ahead. Dewey and his heir, Kilpatrick opened this horizon in North America. Still, even in the cradle of modernity, Europe, more and more parents dislike the mainstream school system and feel that it lacks the humanistic touch of Montessori, the spiritual and holistic sensitiveness of Steiner, or the progressive and deeply ethical vision of Dewey/ Kilpatrick. An increasing number of parents search for alternative schools and do not find enough of them –especially in Southern Europe-.

We dare to conclude that, in spite of some evolution through the XXth century, mainstream schooling is still essentially technocratic, utilitarian and valueless; it still reduces the deeper multidimensional nature of the human being to poorer merely academic patterns, because the world view or paradigm in general terms has not changed yet. Education is always a mirror of the whole civilization. If you go to another country or continent, or another solar system or galaxy, and you want to know about their civilization and world view, first and foremost examine their educational system, and you will get to know everything about them, their culture and their state of consciousness. Then, the educational message of great educationists such as Steiner or Montessori in Europe, Dewey or Kilpatrick in North-America, together with the sages of India, can still be a source of inspiration for a long process of transformation of the educational systems towards

a more holistic, ethical, spiritual and humanistic vision, knowing with Kant that ethics and humanism cannot be separated, and also knowing with R. Panikkar humanism and spirituality cannot be dissociated either.

R. Panikkar warned that technocracy and humanism are mutually exclusive, and in terms of civilization we must make a decision for one or the other. The modern world has made a clear decision –for technocracy-, and nothing has changed yet in general terms; in fact it has even worsened, just see the abuse of technology in daily life and amongst children in particular, or just see the increasing consumerism everywhere, also in Asia. The school/ college system is a reflection of this technocratic world view. R. Panikkar defended another choice –for humanism-; like Steiner and Montessori, like the sages of India.²³

In spite of the normal caution in this kind of mainstream report, the researchers of the University of West England conclude:

“There are a number of aspects of Steiner school practice that might readily inform good practice in maintained schools, whilst others may be more controversial but could be the basis for profitable dialogue.”²⁴

The controversial aspects could only arise from the difference of paradigm or world view between Steiner and mainstream schooling as indicated in the introduction of this article. If we are aware of it the controversy may be properly channelled, knowing that within the paradigm of Philosophical Idealism wisdom is an invitation; unlike the common ego and ordinary ideologies, wisdom never imposes itself. As the renowned philosopher R. Panikkar always stated, you can take it or not, this is your freedom. It is an invitation; it only suggests.

VI. ENDNOTES

1. Steiner R., "The Roots of Education. Foundations of Waldorf Education", New York, Anthroposophic Press, 1997, p 13-14.
2. Cf Steiner R., 1997, p 13.
3. Cf Steiner R., 1997, p 13.
4. Steiner R., 1997, p 29.
5. Ph. Woods, M. Ashley, G. Woods, "Steiner Schools in England", University of West of England, Bristol, 2005, p 7.
6. Cf Montessori M., "The Montessori Method", ed by G.L. Gutek, New York, Rowman and Littlefield, 2004, p 127 and p 262-264.
7. Montessori M., 2004, p 74.
8. Montessori M., 2004, p 120.
9. Montessori M. 2004, p 124.
10. Montessori M, 2004, p 74.
11. Montessori M., 2004, p 124.
12. Cf Montessori M, 2004, chapter 10.
13. Cf Lillard A.S., "Playful Learning and Montessori Education", "American Journal of Play", winter 2013.
14. Cf Montessori M., 2004, chapter 12, 13 and 14.
15. Montessori M., 2004, p 73.

16. Steiner R., "The Kingdom of Childhood. Introductory Talks on Waldorf Education", New York, Anthroposophic Press, 1995, p 85.
17. Steiner R., 1997, p 48.
Cf also Steiner R., 1996, p 6.
18. Steiner R., 1995, p 59.
19. Steiner R., 1995, p 60.
20. Steiner R., "The Education of the Child. And Early Lectures on Education", New York, Anthroposophic Press, 1996, p 31.
21. Cf Steiner R., 1997, p 64-67.
22. Steiner R., 1997, p 12.
23. Cf Panikkar, "A Dwelling Place for Wisdom", Louisville (KY), Westminster John Knox Press, 1993.
24. Ph. Woods, M. Ashley, G. Woods, 2005, p 8.