



Bund der Freien
Waldorfschulen

Steiner/Waldorf Education – A Short Guide

1 Perspectives



Waldorf Education Is Successful

In September 1919, Rudolf Steiner opened the first Waldorf School in Stuttgart. Today there are almost 1,100 Waldorf Schools in 70 countries, most of them in western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. The number has increased tenfold since 1970.

Parents enrol their children in these schools because they expect them to receive greater individual support and attention, because they value traditional humanistic educational content and a wide range of artistic activities taught independently of state programmes and requirements, and, not least, because they feel attracted by an informal, confidence-inspiring atmosphere.

Waldorf Education is not uncontroversial. Some people think that the pupils do not learn enough, that their exam results, which are of such importance today, cannot compete, and that the children do not learn the things needed to function successfully in a modern, achievement-oriented society.

Statistics show, however, that performance levels as compared with state schools are not something to worry about. The average proportion of Waldorf pupils leaving school with an entrance qualification for higher education is impressive. Graduates from Waldorf Schools are valued in the world of work for their initiative and ability to work in a team and pursue their chosen occupation successfully.

What, then, does being in a Waldorf School mean for pupils and teachers?

Waldorf Schools worldwide 1,085

Africa 22

Egypt 1
Kenya 2
Namibia 1
South Africa 17
Tanzania 1

America 215

Argentina 14
Brazil 30
Canada 18
Chile 4
Colombia 4
Dom. Republik 1
Guatemala 1
Mexico 13
Peru 3

Uruguay 1

USA 126

Asia 61

China 7
India 7
Israel 14
Japan 7
Kazakhstan 1
Kirgizstan 1
Korea (Republic) 10
Malaysia 1
Nepal 2
Philippines 4
Taiwan 3
Tajikistan 1
Thailand 3

Europe 734

Armenia 1
Austria 19
Belgium 28
Croatia 2
Czech Republic 18
Denmark 16
Estonia 10
Finland 26
France 15
Georgia 1
Germany 238
Great Britain 31
Hungary 34
Iceland 2
Ireland 4
Italy 31
Latvia 2
Liechtenstein 1
Lithuania 3
Luxembourg 1
Moldova 1
Netherlands 90
Norway 31
Poland 4
Portugal 2
Romania 12
Russia 18
Slovakia 2
Slovenia 4
Spain 10
Sweden 43
Switzerland 30
Ukraine 4

Oceania 53

Australia 43
New Zealand 10
(Status 2016)



Waldorf Education means individually age-appropriate support for pupils



The way in which Waldorf Education approaches children and young people is divided into three separate age-dependent styles.

In the first seven years, up to about the time of the second dentition, the teacher creates opportunities for imitation. In the second seven-year period, the class teacher – who in the double period of the “main lesson” in the morning introduces his children to all the major fields of knowledge – responds to the natural need of children for a mature role model, a beloved authority. It is not until after puberty that the focus of educational activity for the young person shifts to information as such and support for the development of independent judgement.

From the start of school to about the age of twelve, at which time the child begins to develop an adult consciousness, the important thing in lessons is to feed the developing inner world of the child’s imagination. Hence the fairy tales, the “thought-provoking stories”



in the first years of school, the broad treatment of the great European mythologies in the “story-telling part” of the main lesson.

Hence also lessons which are guided by concrete observations and images of nature, and not by abstract theoretical models, in the first natural-history lessons.

Only in upper school, after puberty, does the development of scientific concepts in the narrow sense have its age-appropriate place in Waldorf Education. It is here that the abstract concepts developed in modern science are included in the subject matter considered in the lessons; they are conducted in an open and unbiased way to encourage the students to undertake their own investigations based on their own observations to reach their own conclusions.

Waldorf School means an affectionate and open environment

Anyone involved with small children will forever be filled with wonder at their fascinating early attempts to comprehend and understand the world. Human beings start to form relationships between different perceptions at a very early stage. To begin with this involves the perception of expressions, such as the mother's smile. Subsequently these initial, still fluid impressions are consolidated into the object world of our adult consciousness and later still into the abstract world of the concepts of modern science.

According to Rudolf Steiner, the founder of Waldorf Education, we are all our own educators. Where others direct this process, we cannot talk about education but only about training and indoctrination. As a consequence, the teachers in a Waldorf School have to ensure that the conditions are created under which the pupils can form relationships between their perceptions for themselves, under which they can educate themselves.





This is why Waldorf education includes a wide range of practical provision in the various arts, the fun of play, speech and movement, colours, “organic” school buildings, concerts and drama performances, festivals and celebrations, minor and major rituals, rhythmical processes in the course of the day and year. In the upper school, practice placements and other projects are added in agriculture, crafts and industry, in modern business enterprises or in development aid, in other words, in current and constantly updated fields of life.

The underlying principle here is “learning through discovery”: every child takes what they need for their development if they are encouraged and given the freedom to do so. Such freedom in lessons does not mean doing away with demanding learning objectives. Every child and adolescent should be given individual support, which often leads to achievements and results far above any standard level.

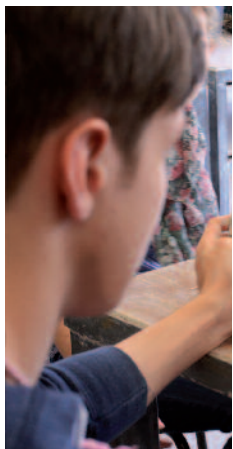
Waldorf Education does not mean teaching an ideology

Waldorf Schools are sometimes accused of teaching Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy. What, then, is the connection between the education in Waldorf Schools and anthroposophy? Steiner himself called it, "the path of knowledge which aims to connect the spiritual aspect in the human being with the spiritual aspect in the cosmos".

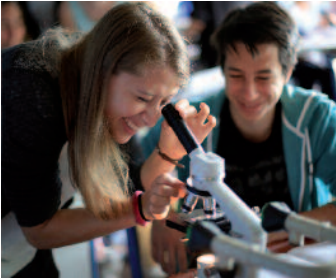
Steiner held the view that people who obtain knowledge can change themselves: every person has the potential to develop new cognitive abilities through the relevant exercises. But in Anthroposophy, paths of inner development are intended for adults. They require psychological stability, mature thoughtfulness and a good portion of self-criticism, something which cannot be assumed in children and the growing young person.

So where precisely does Steiner's description of esoteric paths of schooling in Anthroposophy connect with his core ideas on education? Every path of development is concerned with obtaining new abilities of observation and processing such observations, in a way similar to what happens in every research laboratory. Here and on the Anthroposophical path of development intuition plays a major role. Every artist knows those productive moments in which a crucial idea lights up in them on something which may previously have been just a vague thought.

Albert Einstein describes how such insights can be groundbreaking even for mathematicians working in the realm of pure logic. Often they are preceded by a laborious period of collecting, observing, waiting and practising before the insight lights up. Waldorf teaching places a lot of emphasis on taking the intuitions of both teachers and pupils seriously. In brief, we can say that the teaching methods of Waldorf Schools are informed but not determined by Anthroposophy. Anthroposophy is not appropriate for children and does not belong in lessons.



Quality in Waldorf Schools



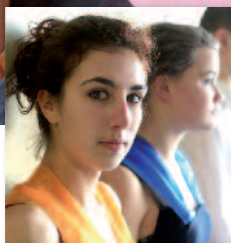
Quality in education assumes that the actors have a clear concept of what they mean by education. Depending on their image of the human being, the spectrum ranges from mechanistic models (“human biocomputer”) through behavioural methods (“punishment and reward”) or a standardised “output orientation” to purely experientially oriented self-experience.

In contrast to these one-sided models, Waldorf education focuses on the development of the personality as a whole. All skills and knowledge which pupils obtain in school pass through the stages of individual action (volition), creatively investigating what they have experienced (feeling), and their own age-appropriate development of concepts (thinking). For teachers, this demands a high degree of technical skill, imagination and attentiveness for their pupils.

So they must begin by trying to achieve for themselves what they demand of their pupils, and they must also be ready to keep reflecting on the process.

Waldorf Schools have for some years been developing their own quality process which additionally includes looking at the culture in each school from the outside. For this purpose, the faculties of each school form intervision groups to exchange experiences about their visits. Additionally, there are school visits by external mentors who – on an equal footing because their work is also the subject of reflection – make suggestions for quality development within the faculties of each school.

Such external support lasts for about two years. After that, the faculties themselves take on full responsibility for the ongoing implementation and development of quality in their school.



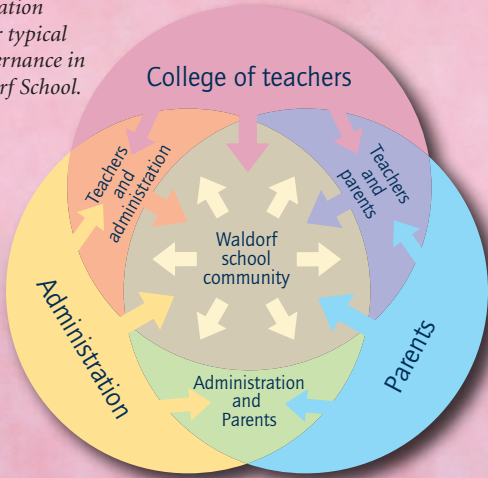
Waldorf School means independence and self-governance

The Waldorf School was founded in the course of a political campaign as the nucleus for freeing cultural life from the powers of the state and the economy.

Towards the end of the First World War, Rudolf Steiner placed the ideals of the French Revolution – Liberty, Equality, Fraternity – in the context of coexistence in society by showing that liberty belongs to cultural and intellectual life, and to all those areas in which the development of individual abilities is of primary importance; equality belongs to the sphere of the law and rights, those areas where democratic decision-making processes in which all people must be involved on an equal basis are of primary importance; and fraternity, the concern for the needs of others, belongs to the sphere of the economy. It is on this foundation that Steiner established his demand for self-governance in cultural life and thus also in the education system.

The traditional view of society held that individuals have to serve their nation, and totalitarian systems of the twentieth century took this view to extremes.

Organisation chart for typical self-governance in a Waldorf School.



Steiner, in contrast, saw the state as there to serve the people. His idea of the "Threefold Order of the Social Organism" anticipates what was subsequently formulated as the highest principle of the German constitution: "Human dignity is inviolable. To respect and protect it is the duty of all state authority." The individual has the right to free development of her personality. The state must protect this process against encroachment by economic or other powers in society, and must not seek to govern it itself. What Rudolf Steiner had in mind was the active participation of every person in all three spheres of the "Social Organism" (in culture, the economy, and democratic rights).

For teachers in particular, who function as role models for the up-and-coming generation, it is important, Steiner says, that they are "at work, really at work, in all three" spheres. With regard to the practice in Waldorf Schools, this means that the teachers have to adhere neither to state nor their own curricula laid down in advance. The schools are not, as a rule, led by a principal; the faculty of teachers governs the school together in all educational and organisational questions.

*"Which form of governance is the best?
The one that teaches us to govern ourselves."
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

Perspectives

is a publication which at irregular intervals provides brief and concise information about Waldorf Schools and Waldorf Education.

Publisher:

Bund der freien Waldorschulen

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Status: January 2017

Editorial: Henning Kullak-Ublick

Design: www.lierl.de

Photos: www.lottefischer.de

Available from: www.waldorfschule-shop.de

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