

**Steiner
Education
Information**

Waldorf (Rudolf Steiner) Education

Without doubt, one of the issues of great concern to many people in our somewhat troubled times is whether or not education is actually meeting the real needs of today's, or more particularly tomorrow's world. Many parents want an education which, while not overly religious, reflects a spiritual view of the world.

Waldorf Education is an approach to children's schooling that is based firmly on the needs of the developing child. All aspects of the school – the curriculum, the method of teaching, the school organisation, for example – exist to further the child's education. The schools are seen as developing communities, where both teachers and parents take joint responsibility for the children's development.

Underlying Assumption

The approach to education in every Steiner, or Waldorf, school arises out of an attempt by the teachers to see the human being in as complete a way as possible, taking at least the following aspects into account: physical, emotional, intellectual, social, moral, creative and spiritual. In fact, it is this latter aspect – the spiritual – that is seen to be at the core of what the human being is. Rudolf Steiner describes the child as a spiritual being, who brings his or her own gifts into the world. It is the task of the teacher to recognise and foster these gifts and to help the child become his or her true self. This gives education a purpose which extends beyond that of getting a job or into a course. Steiner education strives to provide an environment where not only the thinking, but also the will (striving towards a purposeful destiny) and the feelings of the child can grow and truly reflect the whole person. Childhood is thus seen to be gradual development and self-discovery of what each individual is essentially. Such an enlarged view of the human being demands an art of education that can satisfy the requirements of that view.

Basic Philosophy

Steiner Education arises out of a wide-ranging and comprehensive view of life known as Anthroposophy (which means "the Wisdom of the Human Being"). Also known as Spiritual Science it places the Christian Events at the centre of human evolution. In this regard, Anthroposophy looks at the factual implications of the Christ Event, rather than approaching Christianity in a denominational or dogmatic way. Anthroposophy is a way of looking at life from a spiritual but at the same time scientific point of view, developing spiritual insight and artistic sensitivity, and the ability to work creatively with the results of exact observation and clear thought.

Through the teachers, Anthroposophy inspires and integrates all that is done in the schools, but it is not taught to the students, who are left free and are encouraged to develop their own view of the world. Many Festivals are celebrated in Steiner Schools around the world, including festivals for Spring, Winter, Easter and Christmas, and the education is basically Christ centred, but this education is open to children of all cultures and religions.

Origins of Steiner Education

In 1919, the world of traditional values lay in ruins. Most thinking people doubted whether the old principles were capable of solving the social and cultural problems of a disintegrated civilisation. It was at that moment that Dr Rudolf Steiner (1861 – 1925), the Austrian philosopher, scientist, social reformer and educator, was asked by the Managing Director of the Waldorf-Astoria Company, Germany, to found a school (initially for the workers' children), appoint a group of teachers and draw up a curriculum. The Independent Waldorf School that resulted is recognised as the parent of those hundred of schools that make up the world-wide movement today. At present time there are 1039 Steiner schools and Kindergartens in 60 countries around the world, including 141 schools and kindergartens in Australia and the movement continues to grow. (www.freunde-waldorf.de)

The Curriculum

The curriculum incorporates an attempt to meet the inner needs of the children at the different stages of their development, not only with a change in style and method of teaching, but also with a careful choice of teaching material. This seeks to give the child a sequence of experiences for which he or she naturally hungers and is waiting for unconsciously. This curriculum is one of the vital elements in the Steiner art of education. It should not be seen as being rigid, however, but as a living curriculum drawing upon the accumulated experience of thousands of Waldorf teachers since 1919, and as being created anew in its details by each teacher for their specific class. What is provided by this curriculum is a wide-ranging, alive and in-depth education.

Teaching Method

Steiner Education is concerned equally with the development of will (the impulse behind action), feeling and thinking: the three basic functions of the human psyche. In the pre-school, or Kindergarten, the main emphasis is on education of and through the will. In the lower, or Primary School, the focus shifts to education through the imaginative and feeling life. In the upper, or High School, the accent is on the education of thinking and the development of personal judgement.

The reverence and respect felt by Steiner teachers for the special qualities of each stage of childhood shapes the school environment, the way children are spoken to, the materials used, the activities undertaken and the approach to learning at each developmental stage. To assist the young people to learn to know and love the world in childhood, to begin to develop good judgement in adolescence, to freely take responsibility for life's journey in adulthood; these are our tasks as teachers and parents.

In the Kindergarten (ages 4 – 6), the little child learns largely by play and imitation. Here, one does not say: “You must do so and so”, but “Look, we do it like this”. Warm security, provided by an ordered day, abundant opportunity for creative and practical activities, beautiful objects and colours to live among and living involvement with nature, combined with concerned loving care from the teachers is the environment most suitable for this age.

In the lower, or Primary School (ages 6+ - 13), the Class Teacher, assisted by other teachers in specialists subjects, normally guides her or his group of children throughout the seven years, taking them for all general subjects. No education can be effective unless the relationships between all members of the school community – students, teachers and parents – are real and meaningful. This is one of the reasons why the teacher moves – i.e. “grows” – up with the class through each level in the primary school.

During this middle period of childhood, imagination and rhythm are very important. The teacher must above all present the lessons as artistically as possible. The Class Teacher leads the children from the natural imaginative consciousness of earlier years to the awakening of more conscious thought in the years leading to puberty.

The realm of feeling is the central medium for learning and development in a Steiner Primary School. There the child is encouraged to experience the full richness of childhood with its wonder and fascination for the world. So often the trend today is to hurry children through childhood into the “real business” of becoming adult. As a result, often their activities are rather like scaled down versions of what adults do. This means that they miss out on the very important business of being a child i.e. growing through a natural sequence of developmental stages. By working with these stages, the skills and information required by education will arise from the child in a natural way rather than having to be put upon the child. On the other hand, if these stages are not addressed or fulfilled, it can lead to difficulties in adult life.

To everything there is its own season! For example, young children are especially receptive and sensitive in their feeling life, imitating and reflecting behaviour, tones of voice, actions and even qualities of being that they sense about them. Their capacity to enter into imaginative pictures and stories is great. It makes sense, then, to begin the process of learning from the imaginative and creative. If we would like our children to be balanced and harmonious within, and be free to look out at the world from a position of stability, an uncluttered and harmonious learning environment is important, with materials to handle, count, build and play with that are found in nature and rich, imaginative play in childhood, then later perceptive, conscious thought can develop freely, and capacities for initiative and self-motivation are maintained. Let children be children in childhood – the challenges of adolescence and the responsibilities and decision making of adulthood will come in their own good time!

Children who are awestruck to discover that not one single leaf is exactly like another, that precise geometric and number patterns occur again and again in nature, or that fossilised shellfish can be found in a stone near the top of a road-cutting far from the sea, will, if that wonder is nurtured, approach the study of biology, mathematics and geography as young adults not only with clear perception, but also with sensitivity and appreciation for the wonder of the wholeness of life. As the young people move out into the next phase of their lives at the end of their school years, we are happy if we see artistic scientists and scientific artists!

When visiting Steiner schools, people often remark about the beauty of the children's work. In our schools the artistic and the creative are the foundations out of which the academic grows. Let's take the miraculous process of reading as an example. When we look at the history of writing, we see that first, certain sounds came to represent particular objects, qualities or feelings.

These sounds, when made, recreated in the hearer's inner picturing an image of the object thus represented. Later, these sounds were given symbols; at first pictures, then pictograms or letters. When the symbols were 'written', people who had learned what they represented could reproduce the sound, and thus an inner 'picturing' would occur. ('In the beginning was the Word.') so the process is first picturing, then writing, then reading. This is why the ability to listen and picture inwardly is so important in the learning of young children.

Children respond deep in their beings to what might be called the Divine, in nature, and in the history of mankind as expressed in the great myths and legends that form the basis of our cultural development. A simple, but profound principle underlies Steiner education. Just as humanity as a whole has passed through great cultural epochs, so also the child develops through stages that reflect human history. With that view in mind, nothing is taught for its own sake but within the context of the development of human culture, thereby cultivating the child's own humanity. Whatever the subject, from science to music, it is presented in a way that meets the developmental stages of the children, and offers both sensory and intellectual nourishment. No fears about the child's future are brought into the education, instead there is confidence in the knowledge that a rich childhood and the development of the ability to face and resolve problems are the best preparation for successful adulthood.

In the upper, or High School (ages 13+ - 17+) Here the emphasis is on rational thought and the exercise of a healthy critical faculty. Specialist teachers are needed in all subjects now, because young people need to experience adults who have made a particular study of their chosen branch of knowledge. As far as possible, all the young people continue to share Main Lessons in the principal sciences and humanities, and common activities such as choir, orchestra, drama, arts and craft, movement and sport.

Out of the ability to connect inwardly with imaginative content, arises, later, the ability to think and reason clearly, to grasp the workings of number or see the patterns in history. It is in ways such as this that all the 'ordinary' tasks of education – the academic abilities that all

schools develop – are enriched and enlivened, so that learning becomes a living, creative process, whatever the subject – science, music, history, mathematics, geography – it is presented in such a way that meets the developmental stages of the children, and offers both sensory and intellectual nourishment..

When people hear that Steiner schools aim to provide ‘education towards freedom’, they sometimes think that the children are ‘free’ to do as they like. Freedom is a word that is often, sadly, misunderstood to mean licence. Licence indeed is not freedom – the children would be at the mercy of their feelings! Even as adults we prefer not to be in this situation! The unique quality of human beings is their capacity for conscious thought. During the fourteen-or-so years of kindergarten and school life, we hope to support the development of well rounded human beings who are able to feel deeply and broadly, to think penetratingly and clearly, and then to act rightly out of conscious and free choice.

Order of the Day in Kindergarten and Primary School

The Kindergarten has its own order, including free play, eating together, stories, painting, modelling, acting, simple Eurythmy (the type of movement taught in Steiner schools), gardening, handwork, languages and cooking. The day is structured in a way that gives the children a sense of security. Normally, the younger children do not attend for the whole day.

In the Primary School, every morning begins with a verse that focuses the children and orients them to their learning tasks. This is followed by exercises, such as practice on the recorder, singing, multiplication tables (often chanted and danced), movement exercises for development of co-ordination, balance concentration, etc. and speech. This is followed by Main Lesson lasting up to two hours. This approach, unique to Waldorf schools, is where a single subject is studied consecutively for a number of weeks to encourage concentration and study in depth. It allows many related activities to be brought into every lesson.

After morning recess come lessons in which rhythm plays a leading part, and which require constant practice: English, mathematics, languages (usually two are taught), music, physical education and Eurythmy. As far as possible, the afternoons are devoted to crafts, arts and sport or other activity.

No homework is set in the younger classes, and when it begins it is in only one subject each night. In the Upper School, the amount and range of homework are extended.

Some further Characteristics

Waldorf schools vary in their organisational structure, but typically there is no principal. Teachers make the educational decisions because they are the ones who are working out of Anthroposophy and carry the Waldorf ideal. Often a Council composed of parents and others, make other administrative decisions. There is close co-operation between teachers and parents.

Maturation is considered to be most closely related to chronological age. Hence the children are grouped in classes with an age range of not more than twelve months. Positive individual differences are encouraged and catered for, as is the achievement of personal excellence – both within a social (co-operative and tolerant) setting.

The schools are truly comprehensive in character, insofar as they seek to serve boys and girls of all ages, abilities and backgrounds in a non-sexist, non-discriminating way.

The students are provided with an all-round preparation for whatever work or further educational opportunities offer themselves on leaving school.



Rudolf Steiner
1918

Waldorf and Montessori: A Comparison

by Barbara Shell

This comparison of certain aspects of Waldorf and Montessori educational philosophy is based on my personal experience as an educator for nearly 30 years (Waldorf and public school teaching), personal observations in Montessori schools, and workshops with Montessori teachers.

I would, however, preface my remarks by stressing that there can be much difference from one classroom to another in any philosophy due to the style and interpretation of the individual teacher. However, in the main, there are several areas of contrast between Waldorf and Montessori. In both philosophies the young child is viewed with great respect and reverence. I will look at the following areas: play and imagination, social development, toys, and structure and order.

In Waldorf philosophy, play is viewed as the work of the young child and the magic of fantasy, so alive in the young child, is an integral part of how the teacher works with the child. The teacher incorporates storytelling and imagination into the curriculum.

In Montessori there is a feeling that because young children have difficulty distinguishing between reality and fantasy, and so imaginative work should be postponed until the child is firmly grounded in reality. The tasks and activities the children do are reality oriented. Montessori said that it is a mistake for children to amuse themselves with toys, that children are not really interested in toys for long without the real intellectual interest of associating them with sizes and numbers.

In Waldorf, we feel that it is essential to realize the value of toys to help children to re-enact experiences from life as they actually happen. The less finished and the more suggestive a toy may be, the greater its educational value for it really enlivens the imaginative life of the child. Thus, toys in the Waldorf kindergarten may be rounds of wood cut from birch logs, seashells, lengths of coloured silk or cotton for costuming or house building, soft cloth dolls with a minimum detail in faces or clothing, etc., allowing for open-minded imaginative play.

In Montessori early exposure to reading and mathematics is through manipulatives. Each manipulative material has a step-by-step procedure and is focused toward a specific learning concept. For example, math counting rods are not to be transformed into castle walls. The Montessori classroom is set up as an open classroom with prepared activities where children work at an individual pace. Much of the work the young child does is on individual learning tasks done separately; each child will work independently on a small rug doing a different task from the other children with the teacher, a facilitator, to intervene only if the child requests help. Socialization takes place in not bothering other children

working, in helping a young child learn to do a new task, or in waiting one's turn if the child wants an activity already in use.

The Waldorf philosophy stresses that the child gradually learns to be a social being and that the development of the young child in the social realm is as important as anything else we do. The teacher has the role of orchestrating how this happens through modelling good social behaviour with children, through joining together in movement activities, singing, or games to develop group consciousness and by helping children humanistically work through disagreements.

Madame Montessori described the classroom as a place where children are free to move about the classroom at will, where the day is not divided between work periods and rest or play periods. The children are divided into mixed age groups; i.e., 3-6, 6-9 and 9-12 year olds. The children are free to choose their own activities in the classroom and work at an individual pace. This protection of the child's choice is a key element in the Montessori approach. Little emphasis is put on the arts. Art and music programs are dependent on the teacher's ability and interest.

In contrast, Waldorf sees the child thriving in a rhythmical atmosphere – knowing what he can count on from day to day and week to week. There are times for coming together and working as a whole group and times for playing individually or with friends; time for directed activity like crafts or baking or painting and times for creative play like acting out a story, doing finger games or watching a puppet show. The teacher takes advantage of their activity by observing the children at play and plans group activities which will harmonize and balance these impressions he or she receives from observation.

The teacher works with the seasonal themes of the year. A balancing of the impulses from nature is woven through the artistic activities using stories, song, and verses to enliven and capture the children's interest and imaginations.

A child longs for rhythm and order in his world. Both Waldorf and Montessori recognize this, but interpret it in quite different ways: both feel the physical setting needs an underlying order to help the child feel secure. The Montessori classroom has an emphasis on reality to free a child's world of fantasy and imagination. In a Steiner school a child's imagination is inspired with materials from nature; crystals, shells, logs, as well as hand-made toys, gnomes, soft dolls, carved wooden animals.

According to Joseph Chilton Pearce, in his *Magical Child*:

Filling in the conceptual gap with imaginary material, ignoring all dissimilarities is the essence of child play. The great rule is: play is on the surface and the work takes play beneath. The child's mind plays on the basic conceptual brain set without altering it. Play reality, like adult reality is neither world nor mind-brain. The child's intelligence becomes invested in his imagined transformation of self and world. And these are singularly compelling. His awareness locks into fantasy; reality becomes that play. For the child, the time is always now; the place, here; the action, me. He has no capacity to entertain adult notions of fantasy world and real world. He knows only one world, and that is the very real one in which and with which he plays. He is not playing at life. Play is life.

As Jean Piaget expressed it:

[For the child] play cannot be opposed to reality, because in both cases belief is arbitrary and pretty much destitute of logical reasons. Play is a reality which the child is disposed to believe in when by himself, just as reality which the child is disposed to believe in when by himself, just as reality is a game at which he is willing to play with the adults and anyone else who believe in it.... thus we have to say of the child's play that it constitutes an autonomous reality, but with the understanding that the 'true' reality to which it is opposed is considerably less 'true' for the child than for us.

Montessori sees the child as having an absorbent mind ready to soak up knowledge and experience like a sponge. Just keep supplying him with ever more challenging intellectual tasks from an early age and you will end up with an educated child.

No early thrust into intellectualism is found in Waldorf, but a keeping alive and nourishing of the child's healthy imagination and creative thinking powers. The child has it all within himself and it unfolds slowly like petals of a maturing flower as the child moves from one development stage to the next.

In a Waldorf kindergarten we do not aim to achieve premature "flowers of learning", much as these "flowers" might find appreciation. We rather forego such immediate satisfactions and focus our attentions upon the child's ultimate good and upon the protection of his childhood. We are looking toward a healthy, well-rounded adult in the future.

Religion and Waldorf Education

The word “religion” is derived from the Latin word *re-lig-io* which means to “re-unite”. It is an expression of the universal human quest for meaning, for our source and our destiny. Throughout human history, people from all cultures have asked “Who am I?” “What am I doing here?” “What does it mean to be human?”

We share questions about creation, good and evil, and what exists beyond the starry cosmos and unknown dark matter. These soul questions live deeply within all humanity. Through different periods of history, great men and women have shed light on these universal questions. They have offered their wisdom to help each individual answer them, to re-unite with the cosmic origin and the oneness of all existence.

In our school [Perth Waldorf School], we seek to imbue all our lessons with questions of universal implication. We seek to explore mythology, literature, history, science and art in a way that evokes discussions or pondering about these universal questions. We wish our students to live in an atmosphere that is permeated with (not devoid of) the quest for self-knowledge, for the exploration of life’s deepest mysteries. How is this done?

The Waldorf curriculum is designed to create the appropriate relationship between a child and these immense questions. Through art, a child builds a relationship with beauty, and in studying science, one seeks an understanding of truth. Out of beauty and truth develop a sense of morality and reverence for life which leads to profound questions of existence.

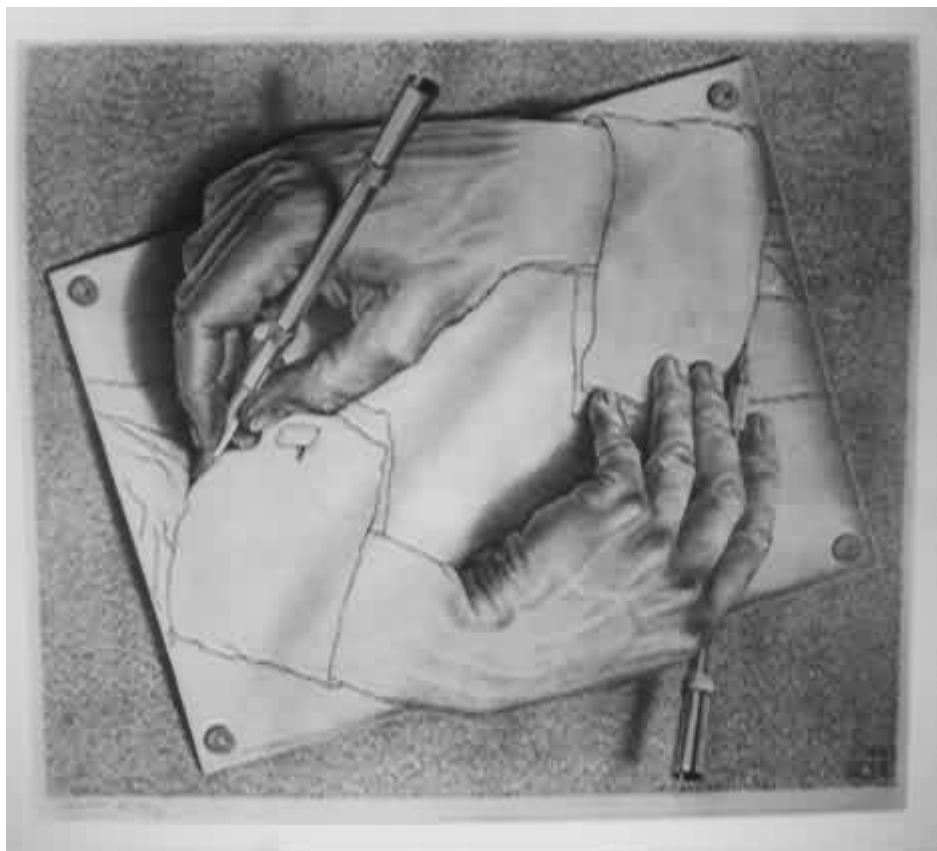
Through the study of history our students journey through ancient civilizations, studying the Old Testament, Norse Mythology, Ancient India, Persia, Sumaria, Egypt, Greece and Rome. They enter the Middle Ages and the Renaissance with burning questions of morality which grow out of their earlier exploration. By the time students reach eighth grade, they have lived with many noble images, many fallen heroes and many searching questions of great magnitude fill a child with the desire to explore the outer and inner realms of his/her life.

In Waldorf schools throughout the world, we aim to celebrate the cycles of life, to address the essence of these soul questions as they speak to us through time. We all long to feel the joy and meaning of life through the recognition and celebration of cornerstone events. The seasons mark the turning points of the year and each season has festivals around the world which express the inner wisdom of its nature. Because we live in a primarily Judeo-Christian culture, we emphasize those festivals at our school. Waldorf schools in Israel feature Jewish festivals; Waldorf schools in Japan feature Buddhist festivals; in India, Hindu festivals.

Waldorf schools are founded on the philosophy of Anthroposophy; the wisdom of humanity. Anthroposophy, offered to us by Rudolf Steiner, explores the evolution of human consciousness. Each historic epoch offers a significant contribution to the journey of humanity from ancient times to the unknown future. Each prophet carried a message for

his time and we seek to understand our age through the looking glass of the past. Neither Anthroposophy nor religion is taught in our school. They are the foundation under the building which supports and defines the structure.

We seek to educate our students in love and immerse them in the world of great literature, art and science. We strive to awaken within them the longing to "Know Thyself". We wish to send them forth into the world in freedom to explore and discover their own beliefs and destinies in the service of humankind. On this journey, each one finds meaning, joy and reverence for life, creating a new union with his or her spiritual essence.



Frequently Asked Questions

What is Waldorf education?

Waldorf education is a unique and distinctive approach to educating children that is practiced in Waldorf schools worldwide. Waldorf schools collectively form the largest, and quite possibly the fastest growing, group of independent private schools in the world. There is no centralized administrative structure governing all Waldorf schools; each is administratively independent, but there are established associations, which provide resources, publish materials, sponsor conferences, and promote the movement.

What is unique about Waldorf education? How is it different from other alternatives (Public schooling, Montessori, etc)?

The best overall statement on what is unique about Waldorf education is to be found in the stated goals of the schooling: “to produce individuals who are able, in and of themselves, to impart meaning to their lives”.

The aim of Waldorf schooling is to educate the whole child, “head, heart and hands”. The curriculum is as broad as time will allow, and balances academics subjects with artistic and practical activities.

Waldorf teachers are dedicated to creating a genuine love of learning within each child. By freely using arts and activities in the service of teaching academics, an internal motivation to learn is developed in the students, doing away with the need for competitive testing and grading.

Some distinctive features of Waldorf education include the following:

- Academics are de-emphasized in the early years of schooling. There is no academic content in the Waldorf kindergarten experience (although there is a good deal of cultivation of pre-academic skills), and minimal academics in Class One. The letters are introduced artistically in Class 2, with the children learning to read from their own writing in Class 2 or 3.
- During the primary school years (grades 1-7) the students have a class teacher who stays with the same class for (ideally) the first seven years of their schooling.
- Certain activities which are often considered “frills” at mainstream schools are central at Waldorf schools: art, music, gardening and foreign languages, to name a few. In the younger grades, all subjects are introduced through artistic mediums, because the children respond better to this medium than to dry lecturing and rote learning. All children learn to play recorder and to knit.

- There are no “textbooks” as such in the first through fifth grades. All children have “Main Lesson books”, which are their own workbooks which they fill in during the course of the year. They essentially produce their own “textbooks” which they record their experiences and what they have learned. Upper grades use textbooks to supplement their main lesson work.
- Learning in a Waldorf school is a non-competitive activity. There are no grades given at the primary level; the teacher writes a detailed evaluation of the child at the end of each school year.
- The use of electronic media such as television, internet access/computer games and mobile phones by young children is strongly discouraged in Waldorf schools.

What is the curriculum at a Waldorf school like?

The Waldorf curriculum is designed to be responsive to the various phases of a child’s development. The era of human history being studied corresponds in many ways with the stage of development of the child. For example, in Kindergarten children are presented with fairy stories matching their dreamy state of consciousness, Class 4 study the Vikings and Norse mythology which suits their war-like feelings, Class 5 learn of the Greeks at the time their intellect is awakening and their sense of fair play is becoming obvious, and so on. The relationship between student and teacher is, likewise, recognized to be both crucial and changing throughout the course of childhood and early adolescence.

The main subjects, such as history, language, arts, science and mathematics are, as mentioned, taught in Main Lesson blocks of two to three hours per day, with each block lasting from three to five weeks. (See “What is a Main Lesson” below).

The total Waldorf curriculum has been likened to an ascending spiral: subjects are revisited several times, but each new exposure affords greater depth and new insights into the subject at hand.

What is a Main Lesson?

Each day in a Steiner School opens with a Main Lesson which lasts approximately 2 hours – from Class 1 to Class 7. The Main Lesson is a central feature of the Steiner approach. It focuses on the main cultural subjects – Sciences and Humanities – in a rich, integrated curriculum closely allied to the development of the child. Each Main Lesson theme lasts from three to five weeks and is connected to the others either in a horizontal sequence (throughout the year) or in a vertical sequence (across the span of the years).

The Class Teacher endeavours to make each lesson an artistic whole, which supports the child’s learning and understanding to an age-appropriate level. The Main Lessons incorporate a range of activities and content which address the children’s intellectual-cognitive, aesthetic-affective and practical modes of learning.

How did Waldorf education get started?

In 1919, Rudolf Steiner, the Austrian philosopher, scientist and artist, was invited to give a series of lectures to the workers of the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart, Germany. As a result, the factory's owner, Emil Molt, asked Steiner to establish and lead a school for the children of the factory's employees. Steiner agreed to do so with four conditions:

- The school should be open to all children;
- It should be coeducational;
- It should be a unified twelve-year school; and
- That the teachers, those who would be working directly with the children, should take the leading role in the running of the school, with a minimum of interference from governmental or economic concerns.

Molt agreed to the conditions and, after a training period for the prospective teachers, die Freie Waldorfschule (the Free Waldorf School) was opened September 7, 1919.

What is the philosophy behind Waldorf education?

Consistent with his philosophy called Anthroposophy, Steiner designed a curriculum responsive to the developmental phases in childhood and nurturing of children's imaginations. He believed that schools should cater to the needs of children rather than the demands of the government or economic forces, so he developed schools that encourage creativity and free-thinking.

Why should I send my child to a Waldorf school?

The main reason to send your child to a Waldorf school is to honour and protect the wonder of childhood. Every effort is expended to make Waldorf schools safe, secure and nurturing environments for the children.

Secondly, Waldorf education has a consistent philosophy of child development underlying the curriculum. All subjects are introduced in age-appropriate fashion. Finally, Waldorf schools produce graduates who are academically advantaged with respect to their public school counterparts, and who consistently gain admission to top universities.

How do students adjust to life after school?

Steiner education has existed in Australia for over 45 years. Therefore there are many Steiner graduates around Australia in their twenties, thirties and even forties. These graduates have shown themselves to be well able to meet difficult and shifting circumstances in the world and to retain their presence of mind. They are able to keep their

equilibrium under stress, to achieve well in their chosen careers and to take initiative in their work, social and personal lives.

Who was Rudolf Steiner?

Dr. Rudolf Steiner was a highly respected and well-published scientific, literary and philosophical scholar who was particularly known for his work on Goethe's scientific writings. He later came to incorporate his scientific investigations with his interest in spiritual development. He became a forerunner in the field of spiritual-scientific investigation for the modern 20th century individual.

His background in history and civilizations coupled with his observation in life gave the world the gift of Waldorf Education. It is a deeply insightful application of learning based on the Study of Humanity with developing consciousness of self and the surrounding world.

How is reading taught in a Waldorf school? Why do Waldorf students wait until 2nd grade to begin learning to read?

Waldorf education is deeply connected with oral tradition, typically beginning with the teacher telling the children fairy tales throughout Kindergarten and first grade. The oral approach is used throughout Waldorf education: mastery of oral communication is seen as being integral to all learning.

Reading instruction, as such, is deferred. Instead, writing is taught first. During the first grade year the children explore how our alphabet came about, discovering, as the ancients did, how each letter's form evolved out of pictograph. Writing thus evolves out of the children's art, and their ability to read likewise evolves as a natural and, indeed, comparatively effortless stage of their mastery of language.

Why is so much emphasis put on festivals?

Seasonal festivals serve to connect humanity with the rhythms of nature and of the cosmos. The festivals originated in ancient cultures, yet have been adapted over time. To join the seasonal moods of the year, in a festive way, benefits the inner life of the soul. Celebrating is an art. There is joy in the anticipation, the preparation, the celebration itself, and the memories.

Why do Waldorf Schools discourage TV watching, internet access and computer games?

The reasons for this have as much to do with the physical effects of the medium on the developing child as with the (to say the least) questionable content of much of the programming. Electronic media are believed by Waldorf teachers to seriously hamper the development of the child's imagination – a faculty which is believed to be central to the healthy development of the individual. Computer use by young children is also discouraged.

Waldorf teachers are not alone in this belief. Several books have been written in recent years expressing concern with the effect of media on young children. See, for instance, *Endangered Minds* by Jane Healy, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* by Jerry Mander, or *The Plug-In Drug* by Maire Winn and *Real Wired Child* by Michael Carr-Gregg.

What kind of training do Waldorf teachers have?

While requirements within individual schools may vary, generally Class Teachers will have both their state teaching certification, as well as training from a recognised Waldorf teacher training college or institute. Some Waldorf training programs can also grant B.A. degrees in conjunction with Waldorf teaching certification. Typically, the course of study for teachers is one year full time, or two to three years part time. This includes practice teaching in a Waldorf school under the supervision of experienced Waldorf teachers.

Rudolf Steiner, speaking in Oxford in 1922, defined “three golden rules” for teachers: “to receive the child in gratitude from the world it comes from; to educate the child with love; and to lead the child into the true freedom which belongs to man.”

Why do Waldorf students stay with the same teacher for 7 years?

Between the ages of seven and fourteen, children learn best through acceptance and emulation of authority, just as in their earlier years they learned through imitation. In primary school, particularly in the lower grades, the child is just beginning to expand his or her experience beyond home and family. The class becomes a type of “family” as well, with its own authority figure – the teacher – in a role analogous to parent. With this approach, the students and teachers come to know each other very well, and the teacher is able to find over the years the best ways of helping individual children in their schooling.

What if a child does not get on with the Class Teacher?

Normally a Class Teacher will be with his/her class for up to 7 years. During that time relationships between teacher and students will go through different stages. When there is tension in the relationship, it is seen as an opportunity for change and the Class Teacher will do everything possible to heal the situation. Class Teachers, because of the length of time they stay with their students, have a long term perspective – it is more like a family dynamic, where difficulties can arise between family members, but which need to be dealt with in a loving and understanding way. Additionally, during the Class Teacher journey, a real partnership develops between teacher and the families of the children – again providing a strong base for resolving difficulties. Sometimes however despite all efforts, the situation cannot be healed and this must also be accepted.

Does the Class Teacher teach all subjects to the class?

The Class Teacher is the stable, enduring element in the child's education in primary years and always teaches the Main Lesson. However, it is seen as very healthy for the class to experience a wide range of teachers and personalities on a regular basis. Depending on the resources of the school, there will be specialist Foreign Language, Music, Craft and Learning Support Teachers who work closely with the Class Teacher.

What is your attitude towards Physical Education and sport?

All Steiner schools provide a range of physical education activities. In the early years, the focus is on movement, balance and acquiring simple ball skills. As the children develop, a larger variety of sporting activities are offered, both team sports and individual sports. In Steiner schools, however, sport is played for exercise, health, agility and enjoyment – the competitive element is not particularly stressed. There is a strong element of outdoor education in the mid-primary years with Class camps leading to very challenging programmes for the older students.

How do the children cope in a competitive world, given that you do not encourage competition?

The question is not so much whether or not you are better than another but rather whether you are the best you can be. Thus Steiner schools prefer to encourage *emulation* rather than *competition*. It may well be said that the only worthwhile competition is with yourself, to outgrow what you are and to strive to become what you might become.

A teacher will encourage each student to be the best that he/she can be, and find many opportunities to acknowledge the whole class, and achievements of individual students as they show particular strengths or as they overcome weakness. The whole class will rejoice in each instance. How people cope in a competitive world depends on their self-esteem. If they leave school with an inner confidence in their ability to grow to meet the demands of a situation, they will be able to live their lives positively and constructively.

How do Waldorf children fare when they transfer to “regular” schools? Is it true that once you start Waldorf schooling it is difficult to “make it” in public schools?

Generally, transitions to public schools, when they are anticipated, are not problematical. The most common transition is from a primary Waldorf school to a more traditional high school and from all reports this transition usually takes place without significant difficulties.

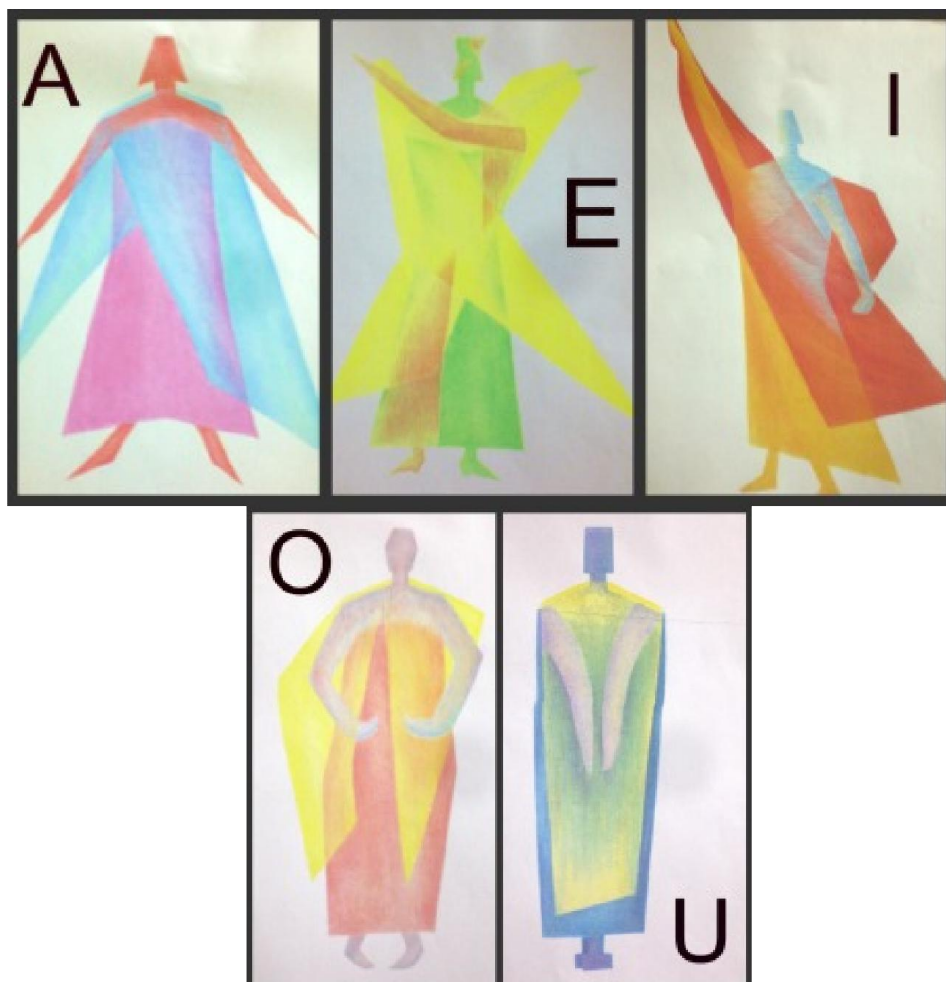
Are Waldorf schools religious?

Waldorf schools do not subscribe to the beliefs of a particular religious denomination or sect. Waldorf schools, however, tend to be spiritually oriented and are based out of a generally Christian perspective. The historic festivals of Christianity, and also of other major religions, are observed in the class rooms and in school assemblies. Students of all cultural backgrounds attend Waldorf schools. Spiritual guidance is aimed at awakening the child's natural reverence for the wonder and beauty of life.

What is Eurythmy?

Most simply put, Eurythmy is a dance-like art form in which music or speech is expressed in bodily movement; specific movements correspond to particular notes or sounds. It has also been called "visible speech" or "visible song". Eurythmy is part of the curriculum of all Waldorf schools, and while it often puzzles parents new to Waldorf education, children respond to its simple rhythms and exercises which help them strengthen and harmonize their body and their life forces; later, the older students work out elaborate eurythmic representations of poetry, drama and music, thereby gaining a deeper perception of the compositions and writings. Eurythmy enhances coordination and strengthens the ability to listen. When children experience themselves like an orchestra and have to keep a clear relationship in space with each other, a social strengthening also results.

Eurythmy is usually taught by a specialist who has been specifically trained in Eurythmy, typically for at least four years.



West Australian Steiner Schools

Perth Waldorf School (Playgroup – Class 12)

Address: 14 Gwilliam Drive
BIBRA LAKE WA 6163
Postal Ad: PO BOX 1247
BIBRA LAKE WA 6965
Phone: 9417 3638
Fax: 9417 5354
Email: pws@pws.wa.edu.au
Website: www.pws.wa.edu.au

West Coast Steiner School (Playgroup – Class 6)

Address: 15 Mayfair Street
NOLLAMARA WA 6061
Phone: 9440 1771
Fax: 9207 1532
Email: reception@wcss.wa.edu.au

Silver Tree Steiner School (Playgroup – Class 6)

Address: 695 Roland Road
PARKERVILLE WA 6081
Phone: 9295 4787
Email: welcome@silvertree.wa.edu.au
Website: www.silvertree.wa.edu.au

Yallingup Steiner School (Playgroup – Class 7)

Address: PO BOX 135
YALLINGUP WA 6282
Phone: 9755 2230
Fax: 9755 2575
Email: registrar@yss.wa.edu.au
Website: www.yss.wa.edu.au

Golden Hill Steiner School (Playgroup – Class 6)

Address: 222 Scotsdale Road
DENMARK WA 6333
Phone: 9848 1811
Fax: 9848 1822
Email: office@goldenhill.wa.edu.au
Website: www.goldenhill.wa.edu.au

Helena River Steiner School (Playgroup – Class 6)

Address: 39 Spring Park Road
MIDLAND WA 6056
Phone: 0419 991 587
Email: riverblossom@ed.gmail.com
Website: www.riverblossom.com.au

Leaning Tree Community School (Playgroup – Class 6)

Address: 15 Bayly Street
GERALDTON WA 6530
Phone: 9964 6555
Email: info@leaningtree.wa.edu.au
Website: www.leaningtree.wa.edu.au