

Education for Freedom: The Art and Practice of Waldorf Education

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Abstract

The long-term goal of Waldorf education is to help each student become a free individual in adulthood. Waldorf pedagogy offers a highly structured approach to education that supports natural child development through a holistic pedagogy that is deeply rooted in long term relationships and supported by the arts. Waldorf teachers 'loop' with their students for many years (up to eight) and thus develop a deep understanding and trust with each student in the context of the classroom community and equally importantly with their families. Waldorf teachers are supported to take an interest in each student and to custom design the curriculum so that it meets students' growing capacities in thinking clearly about the world, feeling deeply for and developing the seeds of empathy for others, and obtaining practical skills to give meaning and purpose to their lives. Rather than being a free school, where anything goes, Waldorf education offers a structured approach, informed by holistic pedagogy to help students develop their own inner moral compasses out of their own growing capacities for clear thinking, deep feeling and purposeful activity. Thus, out of deep commitment to relationship, to love, Waldorf schools create safe spaces in which students can become all they yearn to be, in which they can reach toward the high human goal of freedom in service to others.

要旨： シュタイナー教育の長期目標は、学生が自由に自己決定を行う人間に成長することにある。シュタイナー教育法は高度に構造化された教育アプローチである。長期にわたる関係性に深く根づき、シュタイナー教育が支えるホリスティック教育学を通じて自然な子供の発育をサポートしていく。シュタイナー教育の指導者は長期にわたり(8歳まで)生徒と深く関わり合いを持ち、教室のコミュニティーを通してそれぞれの生徒を深く理解し、信頼関係を築いていく。この信頼関係は生徒の家族とも同程度に構築されることになる。シュタイナー教育の指導者は各生徒に関心を持ちながらカリキュラムをカスタム設計し、生徒が世界について明晰に考える能力を育てる、他者を深く受けとめ自己移入する種を育てる、彼らが自らの生活を意義・目的のあるものにするための実践的なスキルを獲得する、といった活動を実現させていく。シュタイナー教育は、自由な教育ではなく、構造化されたアプローチからの教育である。シュタイナー教育の構造的アプローチは生徒たちの明晰な思考、深い思いやり、目的を持って行動する能力から精神的倫理基準を育むホリスティック教育を実践している。シュタイナー教育の学校では関わり合いや愛情への深い献身を通して生徒たちの希望が全て叶う安全な場所を生み出している。そこは他者への貢献に基づく自由という人間の発展的な目標を達成できる場となる。

"In questions of science, the authority of a thousand is not worth the humble reasoning of a single individual."

Galileo Galilei

Step into a Waldorf school classroom and you will likely see hand-drawn pictures on the chalkboard, colourful student artwork on the walls, and a display with flowers, autumn leaves, or other seasonal items. Notice the gently painted walls, unobscured by visual clutter. You will see a teacher standing before the class leading movements, reciting poetry, singing, or telling a story by heart. You might see the teacher carrying out a science experiment or demonstrating how to create a certain mood in a painting. You will see engaged, eager children with bright eyes and rosy cheeks, working individually and in unison. And, if you are lucky, you may well notice the delicious smell of baking bread or of beeswax being modeled. It is a rich sensory experience with a focus on holistic learning, harmony and beauty.

The aesthetics of Waldorf schools are distinctive, calm, and nurturing. Waldorf schools and pedagogy are designed from holistic principles to gently stimulate children's heads, hearts, and hands, including all of their senses, to promote healthy development. But, aesthetics alone do not make a Waldorf school. Above and beyond the aesthetics is the

empowered professionalism of the teachers, the understanding of children as physically, emotionally, and spiritually developing human beings, the conscious inclusion of the arts as an essential feature of the learning process, and the envisioned future goal of each child's individual freedom. "A real education takes care that body, soul and spirit will be intrinsically free and independent. A real education takes care to put people into life." (Steiner. 1995. p. 63)

This essay begins with deep examples of Waldorf education in practice followed by insights into the pedagogical underpinnings of Waldorf education. Hopefully, this will inspire readers to want to learn more about this holistic approach to education and its goal of freedom.

Fractions in Grade 4

"Would you prefer one eighth of a pizza or one seventh?" asks a teacher to her inquisitive fourth graders.

The study of fractions begins with hands-on cutting things into equal fractional pieces. There is no more effective place to start than with food, cutting cakes, pies, pizza, and fruit... into equal pieces in as many different ways as possible. This gives an immediate and delicious experience that will help students to step with confidence into fractions. They will soon see how common and useful fractions can be not only with food, but in building, designing and surveying. Fractions are everywhere. Many fruits for instance 'know' fractions: apples know fifths and bananas know thirds. They naturally can be divided in these ways and many others so that they can be fairly shared with friends. These same skills are practiced in countless other creative and engaging ways.

Of course most children have already encountered fractions when trying to divide things fairly or when working with recipes. This kind of preconscious exposure is a common and an important part of all learning. Children experience much of the adult world unconsciously before they are able to understand it fully and add it to their knowledge scaffold.

The formal study of fractions is most effective if it waits until the children have an inner experience of being a 'part of a whole'. Each child is a fraction of the class and also a fraction of the family. They have an inner sense of their own individuality as separate from that of their parents that they did not have in their younger years. This inner basis of being a part of a whole lays a strong foundation for the understanding of fractions and then offers motivation for the hard work of learning how to manipulate them. It could be taught earlier, but why rush into fractions before they have an inner relevance for the children. In this manner fractions are now not just another skill, but an insightful tool for working in the world that has relevance to the students' own becoming. Students literally drink them in with enthusiasm. After her four week Waldorf introduction to fractions my daughter said proudly, "Fractions are not nearly as hard as regular math. They're fun!"

Once the students have firm experience and concept of fractions, of numerator and denominator then it is much easier for them to step into factoring, finding lowest common denominators, adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing. All of these follow quickly on the heels of this patient introduction and are brought with as much clarity and activity as possible.

Ancient Greek History in Grade 5

One of the highpoints in the Waldorf curriculum comes in grade 5, when the students are in the golden age of childhood before the advent of puberty. Their bodies are in a wonderfully balanced proportion and harmony. Their minds are not yet distracted by all the inner and outer changes that are to come. At his age Waldorf teachers introduce the culture of Ancient Greece, in which there was a cultural flowering that lasted little more than 150 years and yet has had profound impact on culture up to this day. The students love listening to stories from mythology and history. They drink in accounts of how Athena was born out of Zeus's head; how democracy was born in the small city-state named after her, Athens; and how every four years all battles were put on hold so that athletes could travel to Olympia to pay

homage to the gods through their 'Olympic' competition with one another. These tales enthrall the children and inspire in them their growing sense of self, of harmony and the value of shared ideals.

As a culmination to this 5th grade year, Waldorf students come together with students from other regional schools to create their own Olympic Pentathlons, in which grace and teamwork are valued every bit as much as speed and strength. Dressed in togas they have designed and often sewn, children come together for a weekend of sharing, competition and friendship. These are remarkable gatherings in which all children are encouraged to shine, make new friends and live more deeply ideals of Ancient Greece and the rich curriculum they have been working with in the classroom. Each class makes an offering of a poem, song or play they have been learning. Then they divide the classes into city states to compete in the five events of the classic Greek Pentathlon: wrestling, long jump, javelin, discus and running. All the children have opportunities to excel as their classroom curriculum comes to life through their own efforts. Here the best of Ancient Greece is celebrated. They see how they create culture by coming together and how this process enlivens them in return.

Astronomy in Grade 7

The study of Astronomy begins in grade 7. Having worked intensively with the study of animals in grade 4, botany in grade 5, and geology in grade 6, students are now ready and interested to learn about the 'fixed' and 'wandering' lights of the sky. They have observed the sun, moon, stars and planets for years, but what do they truly know about them or their movements. This is an opportunity for the students to discern assumption from observation and theory from fact. This discernment is not so simple as perhaps they once believed.

Waldorf teachers begin with a geocentric (earth-centred) perspective and later look from a heliocentric (sun-centred) perspective. It is vital that the students first understand how the night sky appears from the earth, from their own perspective. This affirms their place on earth, their earth citizenship and their own capacities to learn about the world through their own efforts. The movements of the sun, moon, stars and planets are complex and stretch the students' ability to observe with care and patience before leaping to conclusions.

While they wrestle to understand how the heavens move, they learn about the work of astronomers since ancient times. The lives of Ptolemy, Copernicus, Tycho de Brahe and Galileo offer fascinating pictures of our human striving for understanding and many of the impediments that stand in its way. Their knowledge was hard won as were the moral struggles that came along with it. Did they have the convictions to believe and tell others what they saw with their very own eyes?

Once students have penetrated this earth based perspective, then they are ready to experience the leap in understanding that comes with the heliocentric perspective. What was complex and beautiful now seems simpler and easier to understand, but where has man, the observer, placed himself in order to gain this perspective? The students soon realize that the observer is no longer on earth. They realize that they can think this heliocentric model even if they have never actually seen it. They are consciously being led from sensory based knowledge to intellectual abstraction.

There are countless ways to enter into this new subject and it is important to be mindful of the students' awakening capacities for logical thinking and interest in the outer world. Equally it is important to connect astronomy with other themes in the 7th grade year so that the curriculum unfolds as a coherent tapestry with many interesting and interconnected threads.

The students are introduced to astronomy in grade 7 in the context of the expanding world view of the Renaissance. The students have journeyed from the graceful ideals of Ancient Greece in grade 5 through the raw power of the Roman Empire in grade 6 into the dark ages that descended upon Western culture with the collapse of the Roman Empire. The students have gone through similar journeys in their inner lives from harmony to power to disunion, likely many times over. Now in grade 7 new capacities are waiting to be born and the many-faceted discoveries in the

renaissance (the arts, sciences and ideals) resonate deeply with them. This fosters their growing body of knowledge, insight and interest that matter for them and for the world.

These are but three examples in a very rich curriculum that is founded upon a deep understanding of child development, designed so that outer curriculum can best resonate with the students' inner awakening. This is a deeply holistic approach to education that takes into account: the central role of the arts; professional striving of the teacher; body, soul and spirit of each human being; block teaching (often called the Main Lesson) that are all supported by a broad variety of integrated lessons.

The Arts

Art is the gateway to the soul. This is why the arts and crafts are central to the Waldorf curriculum, not to make children great artists (although this may happen) but to cultivate children's deep interest and to activate their will for learning. Children can enjoy drawing, singing, and acting time and time again. This is why the arts are an ideal way to begin or deepen any subject, including math and science. When studying astronomy as described above, the children not only learn about the biographies of famous astronomers, they also recite poetry, sing about the 'harmony of the spheres', draw diagrams of planetary motion, draw scenes from the life of astronomers and/or act out a scene of the moral struggles of Galileo. There are countless possibilities for the teacher to choose from to make the subject more interesting.

"[I]f children are being educated only intellectually, their inborn capacities and their human potentials become seriously impaired and wither away." (Steiner. 1986. p. 17)

However, doing art alone is not all that is meant by teaching artistically. It also refers to the artistic ways in which the teachers conceive of and present their lessons, how they interact with their students and colleagues, how they imagine and structure their Waldorf school as a creative learning community. This artistic ideal is imbedded in all facets of how the Waldorf school functions. "Teachers must be so well prepared that the only thing left to do is to shape the lesson in an artistic way. ... Lessons should never be presented until they have been deeply experienced within the teacher's spirit." (Steiner. 2004. p. 145)

Thus, a Waldorf teacher teaches only what s/he has made her own, digested fully so that s/he can present it artistically to the students. "Our goal must be that teachers become true artists in their field." (Steiner, 1995, p. 59)

The Art of Storytelling

Children love listening to stories, especially when they are told by heart. Listening to stories fosters a vibrant imagination, builds effective links between human hearts, and increases mental flexibility. While listening to stories, children appear outwardly still. Yet inwardly, they are actively creating images. They are mentally and emotionally experiencing what they understand the characters in the story are thinking, feeling, and doing. The children are also unconsciously absorbing patterns for thinking in an organized way, interacting with others, and responding to life situations.

Waldorf teachers often introduce new content to their students by telling them stories, biographies, and histories that relate to the themes they are studying. Through these stories, they pass on the world's wisdom and help children take interest in their learning. The oral tradition engages both the teacher and the students in the learning process and in person-to-person interactions. Each teacher and student freely creates her/his own unique images based on an inner response to the story. This shared experience allows each person to grow freely and can inspire them for years to come.

Long term relationships

Waldorf schools are founded on the ideal of individual striving in the context of long-term supportive relationships. Ideally teachers 'loop' with their students over many years, even from 1st to 8th grade. The health of such long-term student teacher relationships is founded upon mutual trust, clear communication and the continuous learning of all involved.

Long-term relationships support Waldorf teachers to know, appreciate and to love their students. If they do their work well, their students love them in return. This is integral to the students' growth and is directly reflected in the students' learning. They know they can inspire a self-motivated thirst for learning, exploring, and improving, or they can stifle it. They aim to be living examples of professionalism, humility, humor, and compassion. They are the strength of a Waldorf school. Day after day, they demonstrate how to be interested in the world and how to act compassionately towards others. They lead by example and try to make themselves worthy of emulation.

"In a Waldorf school, *who* the teachers are is far more important than any technical ability they may have acquired intellectually." (Steiner 1995. p. 56) When students sense their teacher's interest in a subject, they respond in kind. Experience shows that teachers who struggle to find interest in a subject and then attain mastery are more compelling teachers than ones who 'know it all.'

Waldorf teachers are granted a great deal of freedom in their work that come with a requisite amount of responsibility. To teach well in a Waldorf school requires self-initiative. Waldorf is a rigorous education, fuelled by the arts. Teachers are responsible for identifying and meeting their students' growing needs.

Body, soul and spirit

Waldorf education is founded on a holistic understanding of a human nature as comprised of body, soul and spirit. The physical body is enlivened by the capacities of the person's soul for thinking, feeling, and willing. The body and soul are in turn guided in life by inspirations from the person's eternal spirit and also by divine grace.

As such, Waldorf pedagogy stands as an antidote to the pervasive materialism and the malaise of meaninglessness that plague our world.

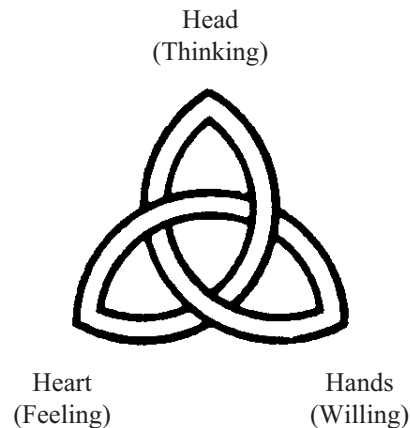
Waldorf pedagogy emerges from a deep study of body, soul and spirit as expounded in the work of anthroposophy. If teachers take the notion of a spiritual aspect of human existence seriously (not just as a matter of blind faith or denial) then the implications for this in life as for education are profound. Each human being matters. In each relationship we meet an element of the divine in the other. All of life's experiences are meaning-filled and form part of a larger meaning-filled whole. This spiritual perspective reveals deeper layers of holism that inform Waldorf education. These spiritual explorations are central to the work of Waldorf teachers and faculties and are a key component of teacher preparation.

Block teaching

The first two hours of a Waldorf school day begin with Main Lesson. This is the heart of the school day, led by their main teacher. Main lesson focuses on one subject intensively for three to four consecutive weeks, a block, after which this subject is allowed to rest and a new subject taken up. Focusing on one subject (i.e. math, science, history or language arts) for many weeks facilitates a deep level of engagement. It fosters interest and allows time for emersion, effective and efficient learning. The rest of the day's lessons, taught by a team of teachers, build upon this foundation laid each morning.

The main lesson is a highly integrated, teacher led lesson. The main lesson teacher designs this lesson to captivate student interest, with age appropriate themes, that are designed to harmonize the social life of the class and lead them

through a series of experiences with the theme that engage many of their senses. The lesson typically opens with a variety of awakening activities that include: movement, recitation, singing, math skills practice, discussion and recorder playing. This focuses the students' attention, harmonizes the class and prepares them for work ahead. Then follow academic challenges complemented with a variety of artistic activities, designed to deepen student engagement. These include: writing essays, drawing sketches, painting pictures, modeling clay sculptures, solving problems, and doing further experiments. These lessons build one upon the other and offer students opportunities to strengthen their thinking (head), feeling (heart), and willing (hands).



Waldorf teachers introduce a new main lesson with a story and/or an experience. Students are curious to know how the world around them works. They can best come to know things through their senses. They love to see, feel, hear, smell, and taste their way to understanding. So, Waldorf teachers carry out simple experiments. They lead students into nature. They invite them to observe carefully all that takes place, and then to describe in detail what they have observed and experienced. Before they ever come to the 'Whys?' or 'Hows?' that distance students from experience, students are encouraged to be with the phenomena in their fullness.

Nature observation in the lower grades leads into more formal science pedagogy in the upper grades. Children's intellectual, logical thinking gradually awakens during the grade school years. Waldorf teachers lead students through series of phenomenological experiments in physics, chemistry and biology so that they directly experience natural phenomena. They drink these in with all their senses. And later through reflection, conversation and artistic deepening, these experiences rise to consciousness along with many questions of causation, relation and context.

Learning through direct sensory experience and reflection allows knowledge to remain flexible and vibrant. Rather than burdening students with fixed facts, that may later be proven untrue, a phenomenological approach supports student vitality, flexibility and interest in the world. Students are led to these 'Aha!' moments so that they can continue to discover new aspects of the world and in themselves.

Creating Main Lesson Books

Waldorf students create their own textbooks. They are given blank notebooks, into which they write essays, poems, and explanations, do calculations and measurements, paint and draw pictures. They often add colourful borders to enhance the beauty of their books. They turn these blank notebooks into much cherished treasures that serve as comprehensive accounts of what they have learned. They form the core of their student portfolio and are a source of tremendous pride, a measure of their achievement. This is their work.

Working on blank pages teaches students how to lay out a page, find balance and proportion, and organize the various elements. It encourages purposeful, focused, and concrete planning and thinking. Through a student's penmanship, quality of writing and precision in sketching and drawing, etc., each main lesson book page reveals how well the

student is connecting with the materials and themes being studied as well as how the student's abilities to express herself/himself are developing. It is a tangible, reliable expression of each student's capabilities, weaknesses, and progress.

Supporting lessons

A team of specialists teach biweekly lessons in reading, mathematics, the arts, foreign languages, eurythmy, handwork, woodwork and physical education that support and refer to the main lesson. These teachers work with the main lesson teacher and extend the mood of wholeness in the school.

Supporting lessons are structured in similar ways to the main lesson to meet the natural rhythms of students. They foster healthy in-breathing, with activities that require concentration and a healthy out-breathing that allows for the expression of feelings and thoughts and the release of energy. They work sympathetically with the students' major circadian rhythms and take into consideration the cycles of the day, week, month, season, and year. Following these rhythms lessens some of the hard work of teaching and learning. 'Rhythm replaces strength!' is a very helpful Waldorf teacher motto.

Waldorf students do a wide variety of intellectual, artistic, and physical activities directed by the teacher. It is equally important that they have time for free play. This balances the day and gives opportunities to move and interact freely with classmates based on their own initiative. In most Waldorf schools this means outdoor play in the elements at least twice a day. Recess is a pedagogically important part of the school schedule.

Teaching towards Freedom

The long-term goal of Waldorf education is to help students become free individuals in adulthood. This informs teacher preparations, presentations, and interactions with students. Being free means the ability to view and consider things objectively and not be swayed by personal preferences or prejudices; the ability to care about others as well as oneself and to put one's will into action based on one's objective judgments; the ability to base one's actions on one's thinking instead of only one's feelings.

Children often act based on their feelings rather than thinking. This is why it is so very important that elementary school teachers are loved and looked up to by their students. With feelings of love and respect, students listen to what their teacher says, do what their teacher asks, and learn from what their teacher does. This is not yet freedom. In adulthood the capacity for freedom is borne on the forces of respect and emulation that are fostered in childhood.

All true education is self-education. Educators may teach lessons, but "it is really the children who educate themselves through [the teacher]." (Steiner. 2007a. p. 126) Waldorf teachers know their teaching can only be effective if it connects with their students' feelings, engages their will and sparks their thinking. This is why they teach directly out of themselves, from what they have made their own, not out of textbooks. It is also why flexibility and the artistic element are so central to the way Waldorf education is carried out. Teaching must stir the children's hearts and souls for them to learn, not solely address their intellect.

Waldorf teachers are given both the freedom and the responsibility to artistically create fully-integrated, holistic lessons that meet the needs of their students. Through a variety of activities, Waldorf teachers engage students' minds, feelings, and physical bodies in ways that will help them to develop their free will and develop capacities to become full and active members of society in the future. "A real education takes care that body, soul and spirit will be intrinsically free and independent. A real education takes care to put people into life." (Steiner. 1995. p. 63)

The First 'Free' Waldorf School

The first Free Waldorf School opened in Stuttgart, Germany in September of 1919. It was called 'free' for a number

of reasons. It was not bound by pedagogical regulations set by the state. There was no outside body controlling the curriculum, the teaching schedule or methods, the hiring of the teachers, or the enrolment of students. It was revolutionary in that teachers were free to decide what and how to teach. Classes were not divided by gender, as was common at the time. Although the first students were factory workers' children, it was planned that the students would eventually come from all social, religious and economic strata. This was soon the case. Religious beliefs and ability to pay tuition were also not considerations in a admission. Most importantly, the teachers and the whole school would "work for the [children's] freedom, in the truest sense of the word." (Steiner. 2007b. p. 124)

In the wake of the massive destruction and social upheaval caused by WWI, Rudolf Steiner founded the Waldorf school to counter the continuing worldwide tendencies towards nationalism and materialism. The Waldorf school offered a comprehensive holistic education, featuring the arts and crafts integrated with academic studies. The aim was to foster each child's tolerance of others, creativity and practicality in meeting life's tasks. Central to achieving this was a well balanced curriculum, motivation through the arts, and deep respect for individuality. As Steiner said, "We can be certain that, if we respect human freedom, our teaching will place people in the world as free beings. We can be certain that the root of education can develop freely if we do not enslave children to a dogmatic curriculum. Later in life, under the most varied circumstances, children can develop appropriately as free human beings." (Steiner. 2006. p. 41-42)

Enrolment in the first Waldorf school increased dramatically (from 300 to 1200 students in 5 years!) as did interest in the school by other cities and countries. By 1928, it was the largest non-denominational school in Germany and other Waldorf schools soon opened in Germany, Switzerland, Holland, Norway, Austria, Hungary, England, and the United States. Now, nearly 100 years on, Waldorf education is still at the forefront of holistic pedagogical practices and educational research, with over 2,000 independent Waldorf schools and early childhood centers in over 60 countries around the world. (Waldorf, 2016) Most of these are privately funded. Others are government funded, and all are modeled after the holistic intentions established by the first. Each school is founded by the communities it will serve. The cultural and geographic contexts and socio-economic needs and opportunities are central considerations in its subject offerings, festival life and structures. Each school is a unique expression of Waldorf education in its local context while maintaining connections with the original founding intentions of the first school. This can be seen in the motto of the Waldorf school movement:

Accept the children with reverence,
Educate them with love,
Send them forth in freedom.
(Petrash, 2002 p. 16)

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