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# Editorial: One hundred years and counting: the international growth of Waldorf education

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## Editorial on the Research Topic

[One hundred years and counting: the international growth of Waldorf education](#)

One hundred years after the death of Rudolf Steiner, the originator and creator of Steiner Waldorf education, we explore modern interpretations of Steiner Waldorf values, systems, curriculum, means and modes of learning and teaching in schools, with practitioners and academics, connections and growth from case examples across the world. This Research Topic provides a platform to cultivate a broad understanding of the “head, heart, and hands” approach to learning used in Steiner Waldorf schools. Our special edition incorporates the main themes of: *Steiner Waldorf teaching on the ground*, *Orienting Steiner Waldorf pedagogy to the future*, and *Assessing the appeal of Steiner Waldorf education*. Each theme is represented by studies focusing on specific aspects, incorporating varied and pertinent examples.

The theme of *Steiner Waldorf teaching on the ground* is represented by the first five papers which contribute significantly to our aim of enabling a broader understanding of Steiner's principles and operational examples at real-life Steiner Waldorf schools in the countries of the UK, the United States and Germany. These put forward a laterally minded approach to teaching and learning.

## [Waldorf early childhood care and education in the 21st century: Taplin](#)

Originally, Steiner didn't expect that children under seven would enter education, even though he wanted a kindergarten for his Stuttgart school. As the need for parents to work outside the home has grown, so have the numbers of children enrolled in kindergartens. [Taplin](#) presents five practices in Waldorf early childhood classrooms which have evolved from Steiner's indications over the past 100 years. Although sometimes at odds with current practices in some countries, the five themes are recognized as standard among researchers. As practitioners continue to serve the youngest of students, it is important to understand ways to meet these very young children.

## Ethical/moral education in the context of the arts: Caldarera

In this conceptual analysis, [Caldarera](#) asks: what relationship do art and moral education have to modern education? She explores the possibility that it is only through art and the development of imagination that children can learn true freedom of thought. Art is the means through which imagination develops. She goes on to link the teaching of art and the teaching of morality, positing that arts are required for healthy human development. Quoting Dewey, Eisner, and others, [Caldarera](#) uses Waldorf education as an example of how teaching arts is not about creating artists, but about developing an aptitude for acquiring knowledge.

## Teaching children to write and read in Waldorf schools: Bell

[Bell](#) writes about how children naturally become ready to learn to read and write, and how Steiner Waldorf education can accommodate this development. Steiner education has traditionally taught children to read and write at seven. Yet, for Steiner himself, this was a compromise due to German state requirements. It is normal for there to be a 3-year variation in development for children aged seven, which will widen. Children are ready for formal learning at different stages. [Bell](#) acknowledges the conventional Waldorf education approach, whilst advocating for innovative opportunities for children to discover reading and writing independently, enabling deep-rooted understanding.

## Media education in Waldorf/Steiner schools: Neumann

[Neumann](#) discusses the approach of Waldorf schools to electronic media, a current struggle in schools worldwide. The aim is to provide a jumping-off point for researchers to examine ways in which technology such as smartphones, should be approached in classrooms. Historically, Waldorf schools practice a delayed introduction toward media education, delaying exposure and reliance on the technology until later years. Despite the huge push by companies to sell their electronic products, there is little evidence of benefit for children. The paper provides background for discussion, even among teachers as to how to face the ever-growing prevalence of electronic media.

## The real teacher arrives: towards a modern education of children and adults: Saar

[Saar](#) looks at education from the teacher's perspective, taking Steiner's ideas around the education of the human being as his focal point. In this article he discusses the ways

in which the practices that create a "good" teacher are no different from those which create "good" students. Using ideas of intention, implementation, and impact alongside the conclusions gained from the International Teacher Education Project, he discusses the ways in which teachers are educated to actively and creatively embrace Steiner's indications. This process results in both students and teachers who are life-long learners, unafraid to take risks, are creative, and effective communicators.

The theme of the international growth of Steiner Waldorf education is continued in the next four papers, and with representation from the countries of New Zealand, Germany, and the UK. The theme of *Orienting Steiner Waldorf pedagogy to the future* looks at ways of understanding the basis of Waldorf education in an innovative way and seeing its long-term sustainability.

## Translating, transmitting and transforming Waldorf curricula: one hundred years after the first published curriculum in 1925: Rawson

[Rawson](#) provides a perspective on the development of the Waldorf pedagogy since its 1919 inception in post-war Germany. He pays specific attention to how the curriculum has been adapted to suit the particular environments where it has been implemented, and the resulting dynamic that has occurred between the "traditionalists" who view the pedagogy as a set program, vs. those who are attempting to implement it in spaces overseen by governmental accountability measures. Ultimately, he concludes, the now distinctive pedagogy has slowly adapted to changing times and become an orientation for teachers which offers the possibility of inspiration and creativity.

## Breaking new ground: New Zealand certificates of Steiner education: Boland et al.

[Boland et al.](#) articulate how colleagues secured the formal recognition of Steiner Waldorf education at upper/high school, with quality-assured, external qualifications for prospective graduating students at the ages of 16, 17, and 18. The NZCSE certificates are representative of the entire Steiner Waldorf curriculum, and thereby not token. Students do not learn how to pass tests; they are formally able to demonstrate their holistic learning, and all subjects are valued. The Educational Coordinators of St Michael Steiner School, London, and Acorn School, Gloucestershire, explain how students are rigorously assessed, while students and teachers resourcefully co-create their Learning Outcomes.

## Publicly funded Steiner education in England - Beautiful anomaly? Missed opportunity? Or both? "Public good," or a contrivance for moulding people? Mepham

Mepham reflects on the birth and growth of the Steiner Academy in Hereford, England. From its start with 6 students in a farmhouse to the large 369 student school it is today, Mepham looks at the promise and shortfalls of what Steiner/Waldorf education is and can be. The school's desire to remain viable in the face of public accountability led to decisions about curriculum and policy that span the whole gamut from retaining certain parts of the pedagogy to developing new interpretations of Steiner. He asks us to imagine a world in which tradition and innovation co-exist.

## The humane education of Waldorf: Attfield

Attfield explores the notion of Rudolf Steiner being influenced by two historical humanists in creating his humane education: Roman playwright Terence, and the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Erasmus of Rotterdam. The core elements of Rudolf Steiner, nurturing free human beings, enabling the 3-fold nature of the human being, and establishing both a creative and holistic curriculum, thus creating an education for the future, are assessed in relation to their humane and apparent historical echoes of Terence and Erasmus. Teachers from three countries were interviewed about these central tenets of Steiner Waldorf education. They critically evaluated how these values work in practice.

The final theme of the special edition is *Assessing the appeal of Steiner Waldorf education*. The four papers in this category demonstrate novelty and progress through unique example cases and structures. Each paper indicates an important and intelligent attribute; these are unique to this type of education. The countries represented here are Germany, the United States and New Zealand.

## Inclusive Waldorf schools today: what can we build on and what is necessary in the 21st century? Barth and Wiehl

Barth and Wiehl examine the value of inclusive schools in Waldorf education. Some German Waldorf schools embed inclusive education to a far-reaching extent; here, children of all abilities and disabilities integrate meaningfully. Waldorf education lends itself to inclusivity. Yet such a unique model is scarcely implemented in Waldorf schools due to external requirements and internal aims. Perception vignettes were used to capture the merit of an inclusive Waldorf school. Student participants observed educational encounters; a 3-fold reflection process facilitated their deconstruction and self-awareness of such moments. Student

participants reported experiences of rich insight and valuing of intelligent schooling.

## Exploring alternative education: a comparison on 3 levels - Waldorf charters, non-Waldorf charters, and local public schools, as measured by the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress: Telfer-Radzat

Telfer-Radzat uses quantitative analysis to investigate differences in California state testing outcomes in three distinct groups of students. Results strongly suggest that the 100-year-old curriculum can successfully educate students in grades 3 to 8 in public, Waldorf-inspired charter schools in California. Eighth graders, on average, outperformed matched local public schools and charter schools in English language, arts and math on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress. The increasing numbers of Waldorf charter schools across the United States make it important to understand whether the schools are meeting the needs of the students they serve.

## Navigating an uncertain interregnum: Boland

Boland uses the lens of educational myth to investigate the history of Waldorf education and explain how the ways that people have come to understand *what is Waldorf* are changing in the face of postmodern understanding of colonialism and racism. He argues that the pedagogy is in a transition, an interregnum, out of which will come a new idea of what it means to educate in the Waldorf tradition. He concludes with a hope that out of these struggles may come what Steiner spoke about a century ago, a curriculum that stresses connection and social responsibility over anything else.

## Waldorf education: developing student's natural talents: Brouillette

Responding to the limited education opportunities available to European children from working class families in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Austrian Philosopher Rudolf Steiner developed an educational model that now includes schools in 70 nations. After World War One Emil Molt, the owner of the Waldorf-Astoria Cigarette Factory in Stuttgart, Germany, had invited Steiner to create a school for the children of workers in his factory. Steiner became the pedagogical director of the first Waldorf school. Male and female students from working class families would be able to prepare for higher education with no tuition fee.

In our theme of Steiner Waldorf teaching on the ground, first, as we have seen, the Steiner Waldorf kindergarten is represented. Steiner felt that his education for children aged three to six was pivotal in allowing the natural development of young children.

Steiner Waldorf education is then shown to have a central role in sparking children's imaginations visually through art, whilst simultaneously developing their feeling senses and thought processes for their moral and healthy development. Following the path of natural development, formal learning incorporates reading and writing upon children's "readiness," when meaningful levels of insight and understanding correspondingly arise. Electronic media are an aspect of modern life, but their application is postponed in Steiner Waldorf education while children learn the mechanics of life; artificially intelligent society can wait for upper school, or high school, "readiness." The Steiner Waldorf teacher understands the natural development of the child, that is of their will, feeling and thinking senses, resulting in children being creatively inspired by their learning, resulting in confident and collaborative young people.

The theme of Orienting Steiner Waldorf pedagogy to the future first considers the Waldorf curriculum which has diverged from the original curriculum of Steiner's to a more dynamically evolving curriculum, as urged by Steiner, in ensuring meaningful culturally appropriate, apposite knowledge, as well as a basis for scrutiny. The New Zealand Certificate of Steiner Education is one way of maintaining Steiner Waldorf education throughout the student's schooling, whilst embedding innovative and modern, unit-based assessment up to university entrance. The intention for Steiner Waldorf education to be free, just as Steiner intended, has lasted in one UK school, however this has necessitated compromise at certain levels. An imaginative contemplation of the wider influences of Steiner result in thoughts about the centrality of his humane education.

The final theme of Assessing the appeal of Steiner Waldorf education first looks at examples of consequential inclusivity in Steiner Waldorf schools in Germany; an implicit message to society. Tests across multiple sectors for educational learning outcomes show success in Waldorf US Charter (free) schools, while other "tests" look for collaborative abilities in Steiner Waldorf students, and a strong sense of their social responsibility. The forming of the first Steiner Waldorf school was ground-breaking in its time; it was co-educational, mixed-social class, free, and progressive. Steiner held complex and ambitious aims to educate the generation of children in front of him, and future generations alike.

Productive areas for future learning could include searching into the past to understand more deeply the influences and contemporaries of Steiner, for example central women contributors, to understand him and his circumstances more concretely. Other areas for future learning are of countries' own evolving cultures and applications of Steiner Waldorf education

which incorporate both global and local knowledges, raising universal questions of ethnocentrism and imperialism. Further study relevant to scholars and practitioners is appraising Steiner Waldorf graduates' experiences of their facing society and the future, in order to accommodate a pedagogy that equips students for a world of climate change, for the future industries of society, and for future living.

We especially observe the landmark 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rudolf Steiner's death of 30<sup>th</sup> March 2025. Since 100 years ago and counting, the international education movement of Steiner Waldorf in many senses has grown in self-knowledge and resilience, and has become increasingly persuasive. This Research Topic, while resonating with Steiner Waldorf educators, will not only be of interest to them and students of Steiner. It will also offer new directions to educators who have not so far been influenced by Steiner's thinking or by Waldorf education.

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