

International Forum for Waldorf/ Steiner Schools

(Hague Circle)

within the Pedagogical Section

The International Forum of Waldorf/ Steiner Schools worked on and approved in its meeting from 19th - 22nd November 2009 in Dornach/CH a description of the main characteristics of Waldorf Education. These characteristics are basics and can be completed by specific attributes of each country. Translations in different languages can be done. These criterias are meant for inspiration and orientation.

“Waldorf”

Description of the Main Characteristics of Waldorf Education

Preamble

Waldorf pedagogy serves as the basis for early childhood education and schools all over the world which exist under the name Waldorf Schools/Kindergartens, Rudolf Steiner Schools/Kindergartens or Independent Schools/Kindergartens. Irrespective of their name and their rich, cultural diversity, they are all unified through several essential characteristics which are described below. Schools or kindergartens which do not reflect these characteristics don't belong to the worldwide movement of Waldorf schools or Waldorf kindergartens.

Guidelines of Waldorf Pedagogy

The basis of Waldorf education is a study of human being and developmental psychology presented by Rudolf Steiner (1861 – 1925) in his volume of lectures entitled “A General Knowledge of the Human Being” or “Study of Man”. Since then, differentiated work has extended the fields of developmental physiology and psychology, methodology and didactics, as well as the number of new teaching subjects all of which now belong to the foundation of Waldorf education. It is a pedagogy which has its origin in the child and its goal is to develop each child's individual potential. It takes cultural diversity into consideration and is committed to general, human ethical principles (cf. U.N. General Agreement on Human Rights, December 10, 1948, the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, November 20, 1989, the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, December 13, 2008). It is the foundation of work within all types of institutions involved in education and professional training (for example, institutions for pre-school education, kindergartens, schools, job training, schools for children with learning difficulties, and many more). Educators and teachers require teacher training in Waldorf education, and feel obliged to undertake a form of self-education which is appropriate to Waldorf education, as well as further continuing professional development.

The legal form best suited for schools, kindergartens and other educational institutions is that of an independent institution, which is organised by all those participating/taking part in the educational process.

Important Characteristics of Early Childhood Education, Waldorf Kindergartens and Waldorf Schools

In the first seven years, the healthy development of the child is fostered by a warm, loving and guided atmosphere which leads to joy, awe and reverence. The most important aspect of working with the young child is the inner attitude of the educator, who is the role model for the child's imitating. That is why this type of work requires constant self-education. Waldorf kindergartens, toddler groups, parent-child programs and other institutions involved in early child and toddler education lay the foundation for physical health and vitality, for wonder and an interest in the world, for the inner readiness to learn and discover the world through personal experiences, for the ability to have relationships, and finally, for lifelong physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual development.

The basis of educating and teaching lessons in Waldorf schools is a curriculum framework which gives the teacher impulses for preparing his individual lessons. The lessons are oriented towards the above-mentioned guidelines. Each educator is responsible for his own lessons and is accountable to the community. Lessons are evaluated.

The Waldorf School is a unified, inclusive school model spanning all ages from pre-school to the end of the upper school/high school. Within the curriculum framework of the various class levels, the subjects are connected to each other. As the subjects are oriented to the developmental phases of the children and adolescents, they enable multi-faceted, age-related possibilities of developing the individual. These consist of, for example, the acquisition of knowledge, cultural competence, social and emotional skills, as well as various practical and artistic skills (see also multiple intelligence).

The educator's goal is to train himself extensively at being a creative educator so that his lessons result in making the students intellectually creative, socially responsible and instilling in them the ability to make decisions and act upon them. The teacher's process of self-education, together with his basic and further training are necessary prerequisites for this.

Generally, one teacher accompanies children through the first 6 to 8 classes as a class teacher. The subject teachers and mentors, particularly in the upper classes, require qualification in a specific subject, that is, an academic qualification in addition to the Waldorf teacher training.

Methodological-Didactic Principles

The manner and methods of teaching differ according to the age of the children and adolescents.

The toddler or small child (pre-school child) imitates and is brought up through roles models and examples. The essential characteristics in pre-school education are free play, that is not instructed but guided, as well as experiences in movement and the senses. Through the rhythmical element the educator encourages the child's healthy physical and emotional development, thereby laying the foundation for resilience.

The school-aged child learns from his teacher, who uses diverse methods, prepares creative lessons and who introduces all the major fields of knowledge to his students through main lesson blocks. The teacher, but particularly the class teacher, builds up a true relationship to his students (and their guardians) and practices ever more formal learning within his creative lessons as the children grow older. For the class teacher, performance standards mean that he must establish and realize learning goals for the entire intelligence span of his class (internal differentiation).

Adolescents in the upper school should learn the following through their increasingly academic lessons: how to look at and analyse lesson contents critically, and to arrive at individual judgements, all of which can be seen in the increasingly independent work carried out in different subjects. In addition, self-confidence, personal responsibility and a sense of commitment to the world are unfolded. In the upper school, more and more individualised ways of learning are offered. Through maintaining the class itself as a unit, social competence is promoted.

The following points are marked characteristics of a Waldorf school:

- Pre-school education without academic requirements
- Generally, one teacher accompanies children through the first 6 to 8 classes as a class teacher.
- Eurythmy lessons
- Main lesson blocks, subject lessons and other lesson forms
- Foreign language lessons as of Class 1
- Timetables, which are worked out, as much as possible, according to psychological-hygienic criteria
- The class as a community remains, regardless of the students' individual performances
- No purely quantitative assessments and tests for the tests' sake
- Report cards which, aside from describing the student's performance, also describe and honour the student's development, as well as providing suggestions for future work
- Pedagogical methods used in dealing with discipline
- Activities forming and fostering community, such as monthly festivals, yearly festivals, excursions, practical work terms, stage plays, etc.
- Religion lessons in different denominations could be arranged if parents wish. Otherwise schools offer independent, non-denominational religion lessons.

Evaluation

Educators and teachers participate in internal as well as external evaluations. This is all the more important because such great value is placed on lessons that the teacher himself creates and is responsible for.

The School's Organisation

Waldorf kindergartens or Waldorf schools are administered and run by the teachers itself.

A group consisting of parents and teachers is responsible for the economic and legal side of kindergartens or schools, albeit within a certain legal framework. The form and structure of these institutions depends on the people taking part, the cultural milieu, and the available legal possibilities.

This form of self-administration in Waldorf schools and Waldorf kindergartens includes delegating tasks to smaller groups or individuals who are designated for a limited period

of time. Within this form of self-administration, all sorts of organisational models are possible. Placing an individual in the role of internal (pedagogical) leader in a kindergarten or school should be avoided.

Working Together

Each colleague feels obliged to participate in the weekly pedagogical conference.. This is the leading pedagogical body of the school or kindergarten and includes foundation work (the study of man/education), dealing with pedagogical questions, the observation of children, questions of organisation and the task of leading and shaping the school together with other committees.

The teachers' conference is not only a place where colleagues receive further training, but also where perception, judgement, learning and giving the school new impetus all lead to a common consciousness for the whole.

Besides the common work in one's own conference, further training and exchanges with colleagues on a national and international level also take place. The Pedagogical Section of the Goetheanum and the Section groups in other countries, working together with national associations, are responsible for this.

Within the Pedagogical Section there is an organ responsible for the recognition of schools as Waldorf Schools and, for kindergartens as Waldorf Kindergartens. The legal right to this name is granted after the school or kindergarten has been recognized as such. This task can also be delegated to national committees.

The Waldorf Schools which have been recognized are listed in the International Waldorf School Directory, published by the German Association of Waldorf Schools.

P.S. For simplicity's sake the word "his" has been used, although "his" and "her" is meant.

Approved by the International Council of Waldorf/Steiner Schools (Hague Circle)

Ursula Vallendor (Argentina), Sigurd Borghs (Belgium), Luiza Lameirão (Brazil), Angel Chiok (Chile), Tomas Zdrázil (Czech), Jeppe Flummer (Denmark), Gerd Kellermann, Henning Kullak-Ublick, Bernd Ruf (Germany), Mikko Taskinen (Finland), Henri Dahan (France), Erika Taylor (Great Britain), Gilad Goldshmidt (Israel), Cristina Laffi (Italy), Rieko Hata (Japan), Sue Simpson (New Zealand), Lot Hooghiemstra, Marcel de Leuw (Netherlands), Ellen Fjeld-Köttker (Norway), Brigitte Goldmann (Austria, IASWECE), Tobias Richter (Austria), Michael Grimley (South Africa), Regula Nilo, Noomi Hansen (Sweden), Florian Osswald, Robert Thomas (Switzerland), Iryna Kokoshynksa (Ukraine), Gabor Kulcsar (Hungary), Frances Kane, James Pewtherer, Dorit Winter (USA), Christopher Clouder (Great Britain, ECSWE), Nana Göbel (Friends of Waldorf Education), Christof Wiechert (Pedagogical Section)

Dornach, 21st November 2009

The International Conference of Waldorf/ Steiner Schools (Hague Circle) is attainable via:

Pädagogische Sektion am Goetheanum

Postfach 1

CH-4143 Dornach

phone: 0041 (0)61 706 43 15

Fax: 0041 (0)61 706 44 74

e-mail: paed.sektion@goetheanum.ch